

SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · SUMMER 1989 · £1.80 · US \$3.95



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GWTW AT 50

THE INVISIBLE
BEN MADDOW

ASTRA WATCH

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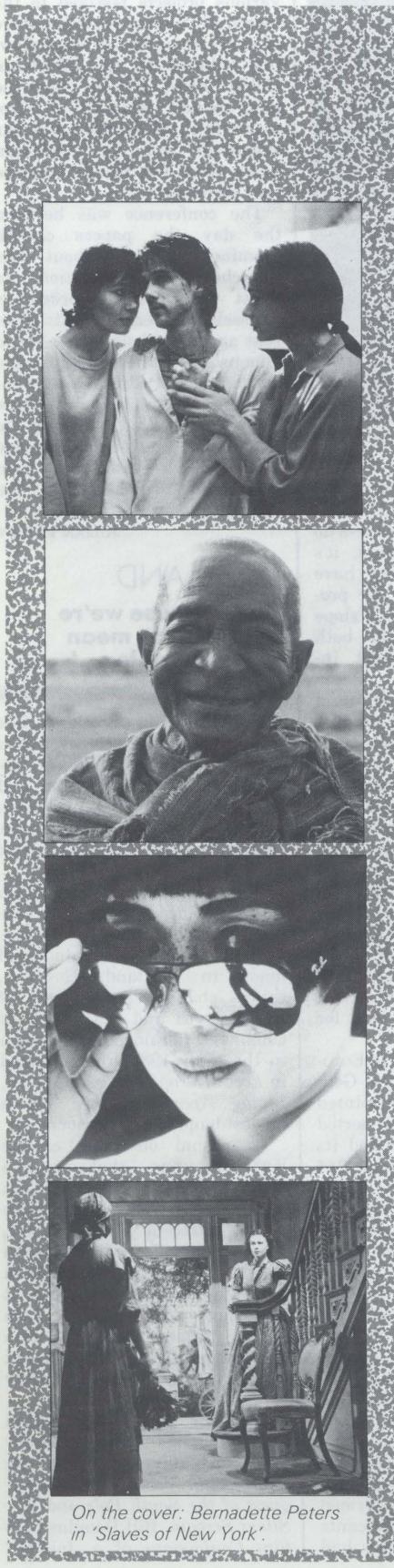
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SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · SUMMER 1989 · VOLUME 58 No 3



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IN THE PICTURE

FLYING MEDIA DAY

MEDIA 92 explains its projects for Europe

In May, it was Britain's turn to host a Flying Media Day. This was the term coined by Holde Lhoest, head of the MEDIA 92 programme, to describe the events at which the programme is explained to interested parties in the various countries of the EEC. This particular event, which was extremely well attended, was organised by the BFI and introduced not only by Holde Lhoest but also by Arts Minister Richard Luce and BFI Director Wilf Stevenson.

MEDIA 92 is an initiative of the Commission of the European Communities, formed to provide support to the European film and television industries, with a particular eye to helping them to profit from the single market. Its aim is to act as a catalyst, injecting seed money in an attempt to attract additional capital from both public and private sources. The programme, which has a total budget of some 40m ECUs, consists of ten separate projects, seven of which are up and running. All these were represented at the conference.

The area of distribution is covered by three initiatives—the European Film Distribution Office (EFDO), Broadcasting Across the Borders of European Language (BABEL) and the European Organisation for an Independent Audiovisual Market (EURO-AIM). In production the main initiatives are the Media Investment Club for Advanced Technologies, the European Script Fund and the European Association of Animated Film (CARTOON). Training is the province of European Audiovisual Entrepreneurs (EAVE). Still in preparation are projects covering audiovisual activities in the regions, the setting up of venture capital and guarantee funds, and training in script-writing.

In an article in *SIGHT & SOUND*, Winter 1988/89, which contains much useful information on MEDIA 92 in general and the Script Fund in particular, Theresa Fitzgerald remarked that 'so far the MEDIA programme has been mainly a lot of talking and a great deal of research.' The conference suggested that several projects have now moved well beyond that stage.

One of these is EFDO. Headed by Dieter Kosslick, of the Hamburg Film Fund, this is intended to channel distribution aid to low-budget films of EEC origin. As Kosslick explained, research carried out by EFDO suggested that however difficult it may be to raise finance to produce a low-



Sir Richard Attenborough, Renee Goddard, Holde Lhoest and Arts Minister Richard Luce at the MEDIA 92 conference.

budget film, it is even harder to find distributors and exhibitors who will take the finished product. He also stated that the definition of 'low budget' varies enormously from country to country. EFDO's upper limit is marked by films with a budget of 2.25m ECUs (mainly French and British products), but the Office expects that at least 60 per cent of its budget will be spent on films costing less than 750,000 ECUs. Distribution aid consists of an interest-free loan, and to be eligible the film must have guarantees of distribution in at least three EEC countries. So far 17 films have been supported by EFDO; these include *Distant Voices, Still Lives, Drowning by Numbers* and *Babette's Feast*. Revenue from these will enable some distributors to start repaying loans this year, and this money will be reinvested in further projects.

An interesting fact to emerge from Kosslick's presentation, which was both informative and amusing, was that only 20 per cent of films produced in the EEC are shown outside their country of origin. Certainly in Britain there seems to be an ever more serious famine of European films on our cinema screens, and if EFDO's initiatives can do anything to remedy this they will be more than welcome.

Positive results were also announced by Karol Kulik, the head of EURO-AIM, which has been busy bringing distributors and independent producers together at several European festivals and markets. As Kulik explained, 'It's very hard for an independent producer, with a couple of cassettes and no facilities, to compete with the majors.'

What we're doing is providing them with those facilities under a communal umbrella. Buyers do want independent product, it's just that sometimes they have difficulty in finding it. We provide a kind of nursery slope where independents can both find their feet and meet interested buyers.'

EURO-AIM has also set up a database of independent product to help buyers find their way around the sector and what it has to offer them. At present it consists of some 2,500 titles, but Kulik hopes that this will have doubled by the end of the year. She had just returned from MIP-TV, where 150 producers from 15 European countries had come together under the EURO-AIM umbrella with some 1,500 hours of programming. She estimated that the database had dealt with some 10,000 requests for information.

From the British-based European Script Fund, Renee Goddard and the newly appointed editor Don Ranvaud reported that when the Fund opened its doors in March it received 244 applications. Since then it had been sent a further 116. Of the total, 198 were scripts for feature films, and about 30 would receive funding. Out of its total budget of 2m ECUs the Fund aimed to support between 80 and 120 scripts, putting up between 20 and 80 per cent of the approved development budget of any one project. Goddard and Ranvaud stated that, in their opinion, the most interesting ideas had come from Denmark, Greece and Ireland, but also complained of what they termed the 'dustbin effect' of applicants sending in everything they had

ever written. Such a strategy, they suggested, was not exactly the best way of commanding themselves to the Fund. More than half the scripts and treatments submitted were of UK origin.

Many of those involved in the various projects testified to the mercifully unbureaucratic nature of MEDIA 92, and there were glowing tributes to the efforts of Holde Lhoest. Indeed, given the programme's plethora of acronyms, Michael Johnson of BABEL suggested that her Christian name stood for 'Hand Over the Last Damned ECU.'

The conference was held on the day the papers carried prominent reports about Mrs Thatcher's determination to resist what she regarded as Brussels' increasing intrusiveness and to withstand the 'social dimension' of the coming single market. Sir Richard Attenborough drew loud applause when he said that he hoped the conference would send a message to Brussels very different from that being signalled by the Prime Minister.

JULIAN PETLEY

SCOTLAND

'Just because we're poor doesn't mean we're invisible...'

Film-making in Scotland has traditionally been portrayed as a cottage industry where a few dogged individuals of vision, and somewhat dubious sanity, have fastidiously pursued the slender possibility of a chance to imprint their creativity on celluloid.

It is not too many years ago that it seemed folly even to contemplate the notion that feature films could be originated and made in Scotland. However, things change. The success of Bill Forsyth and the advent of Channel 4 heralded a mini-boom in the early 1980s that resulted in *Local Hero*, *Ill Fares the Land*, *Living Apart Together* and a modest band of compatriots.

To casual observers of the Scottish scene, that creative burst seems to have all but disappeared. The comparative inertia of recent years, however, has been a reflection of Scottish film-making going through a transitional phase in which it may have made the leap from various isolated triumphs into a lasting entity with a decent infrastructure and a continuity of production.

Over the past year, Scottish production has flourished anew with such films as *Play Me Something*, *Venus Peter*, *Conquest of the South Pole* and *The Silent Scream*. Bill Douglas is to film *Confessions of a Justified*

Sinner, Bill Forsyth still expects to make the resurrected Dylan Thomas script *Rebecca's Daughter*, while director Charlie Gormley and writer Peter McDougall are collaborating on a project which will co-star Faye Dunaway and Harvey Keitel. Palace have announced a version of the William McIlvanney novel *The Big Man*, in which Liam Neeson will star for David Leland. And the long-planned epic version of Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* is set to film this autumn, marking the feature debut of television director Sandy Johnson.

Some may see this as the feast that follows the famine, but the apparent seesaw of activity is now cushioned by a number of factors which should guarantee that the current rosy profile is maintained.

Paddy Higson, the doyenne of the Scottish film industry, has chosen to solve a far-reaching deficiency in facilities north of the border by ploughing her formidable energies and financial well-being into the purchase and development of Blackcat Studios, an industrial centre situated close to the Celtic football ground and the latest Cannon multiplex in Parkhead.

Being a movie mogul has taken its toll, not least on Higson's own aspirations as a film producer. After five years of hand-to-mouth struggle, however, she seems to have reached an even keel and can concentrate again on her company Antonine, which is making *The Silent Scream*.

'When my husband Patrick died I took this on with a kind of kamikaze, go or broke feeling,' she recalls. 'The problem is I never thought it would take this long. I bought Blackcat in 1984 and I've literally only done one real movie since then, which was *The Girl in the Picture*. So, from that point of view it has been a depressing and frustrating period. It's nice now to be getting the chance to make a movie again.'

The Silent Scream stars Iain Glen and marks the directorial debut of actor David Hayman. It is an ambitious attempt to convey the experiences of Larry Winters, a contemporary of Jimmy Boyle in the Special Unit at Barlinnie prison. A convicted murderer with an IQ of 165, he has been described as a poet and a chameleon and was kept under heavy sedation by the troubled authorities.

'The project came to me quite by accident and I was attracted to it as a notion, without having read anything, that somebody at last was trying to show what was done in the Special Unit and what it was contributing to penal reform. The fact that once you start treating people like

human beings instead of animals, they actually do develop as personalities, I think is very important in the piece.'

The film will make use of fantasy sequences and animation and seems indicative of a bolder approach to film-making in Scotland that is also reflected in the work of producer Gareth Wardell, who made *Brond* with Higson.

Wardell's Jam Jar Films made imaginative use of Edinburgh's Leith Docks as the principal location for their low-budget adaptation of the Manfred Karge play *Conquest of the South Pole*. Realising the inherent risk factor for companies which place all their faith in one make-or-break project, Wardell has spent two years attracting investment for a portfolio of six features and now runs an American office in San Francisco as tangible evidence of his international outlook.

There has been increasing professionalism, too, in the manner that Scottish Television is facing up to broadcasting in the 1990s. The company once disparaged as a graveyard of Celtic culture now has an international arm developing game shows for American syndication and a film arm based at Shepperton that has completed *Killing Dad* with Julie Walters and Denholm Elliott. At the recent MIP-TV Festival, it announced a unique partnership with Walt Disney to make the Disney Club series in Edinburgh, which will be broadcast across the ITV network from September.

One uncertain variable in the overall equation is the Scottish Film Production Fund, a body which uses its resources of

around £150,000 a year to foster indigenous production through grants for script development or contributions to actual funding.

In the past it has been roundly criticised for financial and artistic conservatism in its policy making, but recently independent producer Penny Thomson was appointed as its first full-time director and has promised a more vigorous approach. 'My specific and major objection to the Fund was that there seemed to be an awfully big gap, getting wider all the time, between projects that were in development and those that got made. That's a gap I want to close. I want to develop a Scottish film business that is self-supporting and not a service industry where all the parts are brought in and we just assemble them before they're taken off to London for a final gloss.'

We are dominated by an industry that is based either in London or America, but just because we're poor doesn't mean we're completely invisible; there is no reason we shouldn't have an identity. I feel that we need somebody without a personal axe to grind who can meet and talk to people and become a focus for all sorts of energy and problems. The job is not just a question of going out and raising money.'

As co-director of this year's Edinburgh Film Festival, David Robinson will be in the unique position of having three new Scottish features to enhance his programme. The significance of that and the energies it may unleash is cause to think that Scotland could be on the brink of maturing into a viable industry.

ALAN HUNTER

Conquest of the South Pole. Photo: Gordon Terris.



PRODUCTION VALUES

Bearing up on a grouse moor

It's hard to imagine Darryl Zanuck or David Selznick huddled on a Northumbrian grouse moor in horizontal rain, waiting for a recalcitrant bear to go into a dance routine. But such is the role of today's producer. The bear, a thoroughly engaging animal, features in the forthcoming *Ladder of Swords*, and the producer is Jennifer Howarth, whose previous two productions, *On the Black Hill* and *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives*, have both been collecting international prizes. Besides the bear, the film stars Martin Shaw, Juliet Stevenson, Eleanor David—and Bob Peck as an obsessive cop (though in a very different register from his *Edge of Darkness* role, at once nastier and funnier). For both the director, Norman Hull, and the writer, Neil Clarke, it's their first feature film. It's also Howarth's first production for her own company, Arden Films—*Black Hill* and *Distant Voices* were made for the BFI.

None of her pictures so far slots neatly into a genre, and *Ladder of Swords* is no exception. Howarth describes it as 'a very idiosyncratic piece, with a faintly fairy-tale quality.' Black-tinted romantic comedy might come closest: the action takes in a couple of violent deaths and a murder hunt, before ending on the outer fringes of fantasy in an ecstatic blaze of light. Shot, like



Ladder of Swords: Martin Shaw and Dawley.

Black Hill, entirely on location and by the same cinematographer, Thaddeus O'Sullivan, the film looks consistently superb; once again rugged shooting conditions have been turned to visual advantage.

Though modestly budgeted at £1½m, *Ladder* is none the less Howarth's most expensive film to date. Like most British filmmakers, she's acutely aware of the perennial dilemma: at which point do you compromise? Go for a big or even medium budget and you need international funding—which is liable to mean imported (probably American) stars, along with a broadening in style and subject-matter. Keep to a small budget, and the compromises come during production: minimal retakes, shooting schedules pared to the bone. So far, Howarth has gone for lower budgets, since they allow her to preserve what she most values in her films, 'a very intense sense of place'.

'You can't pontificate about such-and-such a film being mid-Atlantic, because we might all have to do that. I've been singularly privileged to have done three films, one after the other, that have been quintessentially British. But it is terribly hard—you do these films on a shoestring, and they've all been made because everybody has been absolutely committed. I'll never make a film like *On the Black Hill* again, not with that kind of budget; it inspired such devotion, but it just isn't fair to ask that of people.'

Howarth came to producing by an inductive process. Having set

out to be a writer-director, she was originally going to direct *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*, but quit after 'the project, let's say, went in a certain direction that wasn't my direction.' (She retains a credit as script consultant.) From this, 'I realised that if I was to have any control over what I wrote, or if I ever wanted to direct fiction, I actually had to produce. If you write screenplays on commission, or if you direct for another producer, you don't have the control—unless you can draw on the experience of having been a producer yourself.'

Ladder of Swords is expected to open in the autumn. Meanwhile, Howarth's future includes a long-planned adaptation, for Mark Shivas at the BBC, of a Barbara Pym novel. It's very specifically set in Oxford. But it's a miniaturist work, very much a film for television. A more ambitious project—if the screen rights, currently proving elusive, can be secured—is Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* ('it's precisely about London, now'), which she wants Trevor Preston to script. 'He's exactly the writer for it. He trained as an artist, so he has the painter's eye, and he has lived in London all his life. He's an extraordinary writer and he must write a great screenplay soon. And I want it to be with me.'

After which—or instead of which, if it doesn't come off—she may go back to her original aim of being a writer-director. If the right project comes along, that is. And, of course, if she can find the right producer.

PHILIP KEMP

HONG KONG Generation gap

Of recent years, the Hong Kong International Film Festival has been the conduit through which China tests international reactions to its new pictures. This year, however, most of the Chinese crop bore the stamp of the commercialism that is now *de rigueur* in Mainland movie studios. Xi'an had nothing to show and many of the best-known names from the fifth generation were abroad (like Chen Kaige) or reduced to making disco pictures (like Tian Zhuangzhuang).

Only Wu Ziniu, director of *The Last Day of Winter*, was left to hold the flag and, thanks to a hiccup in the releasing pattern of one of his earlier works, he fielded three of the four Chinese films on view.

Pick of the bunch and powerful by any standards was *Evening Bell*—a spare, concentrated anti-war fable that had already won a prize at Berlin. Like the best pacifist films—*A Time Out of War*, for example, or *A Walk in the Sun*—it focuses on one pocket of the battlefield, leaving the wider issues to speak for themselves. In the aftermath of the Japanese capitulation, a detachment of Chinese soldiers comes across the remnants of an enemy platoon holed up in a cave. Can they be persuaded to surrender or forgiven for cannibalising Chinese peasants out of hunger and despair? One of the film's many departures is its depiction of the Japanese as human beings.

Magisterially shot in wide screen, with a colour palette that eschews cool blues and greens in favour of yellows, ochres and dry-as-dust browns, *Evening Bell* is searingly effective. The story is bracketed by an evocative image of a soldier hewing down a military watchtower against a blood-red sunset. This metaphor is one of several that caused the film's release to be delayed by more than two years. In Wu's original cut, the watchtower would have been left standing at the end as a warning; now it tumbles into a slow-motion heap as if war had finally been overcome.

The evening bell, heard at the beginning of the film, is a sound montage of bells from all over the world, including western churches and Buddhist temples, and is meant as a symbolic affirmation of life. Wu prefers the translation *Late Bell* because the title bears several meanings in Chinese, implying that peace itself comes too late and that he, as a young film-maker, is undertaking a belated reflection on war.

Made in 1987, it already seems like an echo from a more liberal era in Chinese film production. One measure of how well a film does in China is the number of prints sold to regional distributors. Only 17 prints of *Evening Bell* were sold for the whole of China (16 of them after it won the prize at Berlin).

For Wu's new film—a huge two-part fresco called *The Joyous Heroes* and *The Realm Between the Living and the Dead*—200 prints were sold. The script is by Wu's wife, Sima Xiaojia, and is drawn from a 1964 novel by her father, Sima Wensen, who died after persecution during the Cultural Revolution. It would be heartening if it were an artistic as well as a commercial success. But, alas, in this bloody farago of murder, espionage, incest, ghosts and warring clans it is hard to recognise the director of *Evening Bell*.

The fourth Chinese movie at Hong Kong, *Three T Company*, is the second film of 42-year-old Mi Jiashan. It is a satirical comedy about something that Mi admits could never exist in China—a private consultancy service offering (unqualified) advice on everything from marital strife to puberty problems. Mi has had a chequered career; his first film, *Unending Horizon*, was banned and even his new one suffered six censorship cuts for explicit sex scenes and for irreverent remarks about Mao's tomb. Even to get the film made he had to underwrite 30 per cent of the cost and to agree to two years' suspension without pay should it fail. Apparently 120 prints were sold, so one feels less churlish about saying that the comedy is meandering and lacks the incisiveness and structural cohesion that made *The Black Cannon Incident* so bitingly funny.

The Japanese this year made a poor showing. Naoto Yamakawa was surely ill-advised to call his new, undisciplined youth-culture film *So What*. Nor can one take seriously Shusuke Kaneko's wet dream of a film, *Summer Vacation 1999*, about a boarding school inhabited for the summer by a close knit band of homosexual adolescents. Kaneko, who began in Nikkatsu porno pictures, casts androgynous girls in the boys' roles and shoots the movie in swooning soft-focus. *Piffle*.

More pernicious, because it wrong-foots the critic from the start, is Kazuo Kuroki's *Tomorrow*—a meditation on 24 hours in the life of Nagasaki on the eve of the atomic bomb. How uneasy one feels, how insensitive in resisting the film's melting sincerity, its insistence on the beauty of the lives and aspirations that were brutally cut

short on 9 August 1945. This ought to be Ozu country, but Kuroki makes the cardinal error of incorporating a clip from *There Was a Father*. His own film, drippingly sentimental and underpinned by as saccharin a score as only the Japanese know how, shrivels by comparison. Nor is the cause of peace best served by pretending that Japanese POW camps were manned by tender-hearted humanists who did all in their power to ensure the welfare of prisoners, allowing them full military honours when some, despite their ministrations, sadly passed away.

ALAN STANBROOK

BERLIN

Akerman, Rivette, Jost

The degree to which contemporary cinema has become a desperate recycling operation was painfully evident in Berlin this year, where even the better films seemed mired in familiar habits. Aki Kaurismaki's *Ariel*, a hard-luck story of an unemployed miner pushed into a life of crime, is basically a Warners B-film of the 1930s, cleanly told and decked out with a few 80s ironies, but really nothing new. Martin Donovan's *Apartment Zero*, a baroque male-bonding thriller set in Buenos Aires, superbly acted by Colin Firth and Hart Bochner, offers a chilling and complex view of the American abroad, yet its precise genre positionings would be unthinkable without its cues from Hitchcock, Chabrol and Polanski.

For many colleagues, a major disappointment in the competition was Chantal Akerman's first English-language feature, *Food, Family and Philosophy* (or *Histoires d'Amérique* in French), a string of monologues and jokes by Jewish immigrants, delivered against Brooklyn exteriors within hailing distance of the Manhattan skyline over what appears to be a single night. The uneven text and performances which are addressed by the actors more to the camera than to each other are major stumbling blocks. Yet the film still seems, for better and for worse, a logical successor to Akerman's *Toute une nuit* (an insomniac's night of interweaving mini-plots) and *Golden Eighties* (a grim deployment of showbiz staples within an eerily confined universe), with an equally melancholy aftertaste. Even without the neurotic intensity and painterly precision of Akerman's best work, the singular poignance of her dark world remains.

Even more of an anthology effort is Jacques Rivette's 165-minute *La Bande des quatre*

(*The Gang of Four*), immaculately constructed and executed and with a plot which seems to contain elements of almost every previous Rivette feature. The theatre collective this time is an all-female acting school run by Bulle Ogier, and the mainly offscreen *complot* involves a group of crooks and/or cops—as one of the young actresses notes, it doesn't matter which—whose aggressive and seductive machinations threaten to break up the collective.

The dialectic between female camaraderie and sex, and between collectivity and competition, as mutually exclusive ensnares is as pronounced here as in *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* and *L'Amour par terre*, and Rivette's recent predilection for young actors bears more fruit here than it did in *Hurlevent*. One misses the spirit of adventure and experiment that galvanised all his work between *L'Amour fou* and *Noroît*, but this is still probably his most accomplished feature since *Le Pont du Nord*, with a dramatic payoff which more than justifies the characteristically slow build-up.

Outside the competition, the most interesting works tended to be mainly archival in one way or another: Hanoun Faroki's *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*, a thoughtful and provocative essay film about photographic records of Auschwitz; Charlotte Zwerin's *Thelonious Monk: Straight, No Chaser*, a conventional jazz documentary made exceptional by the wonderful Christian Blackwood footage from the 1960s of Monk at work which makes up its bulk; and a fascinating presentation of the short, quirky films of Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers.

The two most original new films I saw were both low-budget independent productions: Jon Jost's *Rembrandt Laughing*, which follows a group of friends over several mainly uneventful days in San Francisco, and István Dárdai and György Szalai's *The Documentator*. Working once again with improvising actors, Jost exhibits a warmth in dealing with his flaky West Coast characters—who include a sand collector, a picture framer, a couple of architects and a bail bondsman—that allows their personalities, moods and interactions to register even when he is filming them obliquely and elliptically, which is often.

A *Dokumentátor* has a running time of 215 minutes, but not the least of its singular virtues is the fact that one can never predict where it's going. A good half of the film consists of video material of every conceivable kind (newsreel and archive



La Bande des quatre.

footage, porn, TV commercials, clips from features) which the owner of a video rental store is amassing and watching in the sealed-off universe of his shop and the apartment that he shares with his beautiful girlfriend. She, meanwhile, is becoming involved with his young clerk (nicknamed 'Rambo'). A grimly satirical commentary on the all-encompassing qualities of video and on Hungarian consumerism, this is a film that certainly bides its time, but steadily grows in interest all the while.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

LE MAITRE DE MUSIQUE

The sounds of music

Occasionally, and usually without warning, one sits in the presence of a film that is new. It may not look new, indeed it may take a little time and effort to discern all that is new about it—yet there's no mistaking the newness.

Le Maître de Musique is a 'first film' in the sense that it is Gérard Corbiau's first feature film for the cinema, funded largely by Belgian television and a government subsidy, but it is a direct descendant of the many films about music and musicians Corbiau had previously made for TV and of much thought about how to achieve an osmosis of music and film. It was the gruelling and ultimately fruitless struggle to find funding for a

series of documentaries about great music teachers, which made Corbiau turn to fiction. At that point he focused on the teacher of singing, in particular, because he felt sure that the great bass-baritone José Van Dam could handle a major acting role.

Le Maître de Musique is the first operatic film not based on an existing opera but on an original and entirely fictional story woven from gems of the operatic repertoire. A famous singer at the turn of the century abruptly abandons a brilliant career. Struck with a premonition of death, he decides to devote the rest of his life to transmitting the essence of his art and his sense of perfection to two young singers only, Sophie and Jean.

The film is a romantic fantasy and beautiful to look at, reminiscent of *Elvira Madigan* as I remember it now. The relationships between four major and three secondary characters are subtle throughout thanks to spot-on casting, and attention to detail in the selection of locations, sets, costumes and extras conjures a plausible world from a moderate budget. Only one scene, about ten minutes into the film, at a market, reminds one of that other world, the filmed opera.

The plot is touching and intriguing enough to carry another film—about art as a treasure transmitted from generation to generation through commitment, discipline and skill. In the age of instant throwaway celebrity, this underlying theme no doubt touches a chord in many



Le Maître de Musique.

whose tastes do not otherwise coincide.

The film opened to lukewarm reviews in Paris, but has been doing very well at the box office. After nine weeks it was still holding its position in the Pariscopic Hit Parade and the queues are remarkably mixed: old ladies in pairs next to groups of trendy youngsters. On all three occasions I've seen the film, audiences applauded at the end.

Corbier is not a musician himself and unencumbered by any attachment to the elitism which afflicts the 'musical establishment'. Lent wings, perhaps, by the flexibility now available on the twin-track 16mm Steinbeck editing machine which has been his constant companion throughout his television years, he has come to treat all music as sound and all sounds as music, conveying different degrees of meaning. The film is not decorated with music, but structured through it. Music becomes the dynamic propeller of the plot.

Not long ago, I tore a snippet from a newspaper interview with Jean-Luc Godard, which is suddenly to the point here: 'Something disappeared [from the film] with the advent of sound—film language was overtaken by words.' Through music, Corbier has found his way back to the silent film, but his is by no means a retreat into retro, it's a leap ahead into real life. So many films are much more verbose than real life—maybe things would have developed differently if the successor to the 'silent film' had not been dubbed the 'talkie'.

In *Le Maître de Musique*, the

dialogue is crucial, but there's very little of it. And each word, each sentence, is somehow 'dropped into' the music. It is the soundtrack which involves the audience emotionally in the story—all the soundtrack, not just the glorious bits of Mozart, Verdi, Mahler, et al, but the combination of music with all the other sounds on film. Each sequence, every movement of the actors, indeed each shot derives from the music ordained for it. The editing must have been the devil's own job, but it's wonderfully unobtrusive. Of course, by the third time one looks at the film, one notices all the niggly little sync problems that go with playback... but the film is shot with those in mind and on the whole it flows.

Initially, Gérard Corbier tried to cast other singers alongside Van Dam, but could not find the right combination of voice and presence. Then he had some difficulty persuading singers to lend their voices. 'Like some stage actors,' he says, 'singers tend to think that acting on film is simple by comparison. But holding a live audience is very different from mesmerising the camera by gazing into it. Besides, the gap is so wide between a singer's and actor's priorities and preoccupations—it's not impossible to bridge as can be seen from Van Dam's performance. But both he and I had to put so much work into that performance, I simply couldn't have managed it three times over. And at least he could draw on the experience gained as Leporello in Losey's *Don Giovanni*'.

GUDIE LAWAETZ

shown at the Berlin festival it never received a theatrical release in Britain. It played in Dallas and ran for several years in Portugal. They wanted to cut above ground, insert newsreel of the Coronation and suchlike: the point, of course, was the timelessness and the entombment. The end was changed, made upbeat. The two survivors, as I pointed out in the closing titles, died almost immediately they were released. The film was shown at the NFT about four years ago, and I slipped in and substituted my own last reel.'

The Blockhouse is a remarkable, haunting film, despite in Rees' print having an imperfect soundtrack (it was the second picture recorded on the Dolby sound system and there were teething problems with the transfer—though, as Rees says, they are curable). Its sense of men trapped in an Aladdin's cave of luxuries, of candlelit bicycle races through a labyrinth of tunnels, of sudden joy, as bottle after bottle of claret is carelessly broken open, turning to apathy, silence and eventually derangement is chillingly conjured. The penumbral camerawork is by Keith Goddard, a regular collaborator on Rees' advertisements. I can understand now why Hemdale did what they did, they had their reasons, but I still hope the film may one day be seen and judged.'

Clive Rees, who began as a documentalist with Humphrey Swingler at Greenpark, has recently been responsible for some notable advertisements: the landscape of bounding, leaping dogs with Anthony Quayle intoning (Spillar's *Winalot*), and the airship attacked by biplanes (*Shell Unleaded*), originally ending, as Rees' showreel reveals, in an orgy of crashing planes which understandably proved too much for his client. So successful were the dogs, that post-production on *When the Whales Came* was interrupted for a second commercial: 'They wanted snow-covered mountains, so we went to New Zealand, which also is full of well-looked-after pedigree dogs.'

'*When the Whales Came* is partly to do with the wisdom of the outcast.' Rees put up £300,000; Central TV chipped in with £500,000; and another £250,000 came from a US financier. The bulk £1.5m, however, came from the first-time film investor Sir James Goldsmith: 'I don't think he has faith in the conventional.' When the film was finished, the executive producer Geoffrey Wansell took it to the United States and secured a worldwide distribution deal with Fox. Fox, one feels, is unlikely to shelve this one.

JOHN PYM

DOGS & WHALES

Clive Rees, ads and features

Clive Rees' new feature, *When the Whales Came*, from a story by Michael Morpurgo, opens in September with a Royal Premiere. It is a suitably royal film: our first duty, the picture suggests, is to take care of our wildlife; and the tone has a touch of Laurens van der Post. The cast from Paul Scofield, as a deaf recluse, through Helen Mirren, an enduring wife, to Jeremy Kemp, a stern schoolmaster, is first rate; and the settings, Bryher in the Channel Islands, are used to effect. An old-fashioned children's picture, in that it doesn't shy at a moral.

All of which, perhaps, would be unremarkable—though forthright children's films are always to be cheered—if it was not for the fact that this is the work of one of Britain's leading TV ad directors whose only previous feature was shelved 16 years ago. Rees keeps a print of *The Blockhouse* which preserves his own ending; and it's still, it seems, his calling-card. The film, with a cast including Peter Sellers, Charles Aznavour, Per Oscarsson and Jeremy Kemp, is based on a true story about a group of European prisoners entombed by the D-Day bombardment in a German blockhouse and not found for six years.

'It's very demanding,' Rees said, 'and doesn't give very much back to the audience.' Despite the pull of the cast, Hemdale lost heart and although the film was

MOVIE MONEY

Until last summer it was difficult to keep track of the number of ITV companies becoming involved in feature film production. All of a sudden it seemed *de rigueur* to be setting up one of the much-vaunted 'film arms'. Then, with leaks from the Broadcasting White Paper and rumours about changes to the ITV levy system, doom and gloom set in. There was talk of massive retrenchment and cutbacks in production. Drama, and especially feature films, looked vulnerable on account of their relatively high production costs.

When the levy changes were finally revealed early this year, they were less swingeing than originally feared by the ITV companies, though still most unwelcome and damaging in their view. At more or less the same time, however, spirits were raised by the announcement that the BBC was finally going to become involved in the making of theatrical features, and that Lynda Myles had been appointed as the BBC's first commissioning editor for independent

drama productions at the revitalised drama department under Mark Shivas. As part of her responsibilities, she will be putting into practice the BBC's stated commitment to part-financing six theatrical features a year.

Even before the arrival of Lynda Myles, the BBC had begun to involve itself in the financing of features. The Corporation's purchasing arm had a stake in *White Mischief* and, more

JULIAN PETLEY

recently, in Flamingo Pictures' *Loser Takes All* (in which British Screen also has an interest). And last year the BBC's newly created Independent Planning Unit concluded a deal with Don Boyd's Anglo-International Films which resulted, with almost bewildering rapidity, in Derek Jarman's *War Requiem*. It has to be said, of course, that last year also saw the failure of the controversial *Tumbledown* to reach the cinema screen owing to the inability of

the Corporation and the unions to reach an agreement over additional payments to those involved in the production.

Such disagreements have bedevilled the BBC's attempts to break into the theatrical arena. However, in May 1987 the BBC and BETA did manage to strike a deal which enabled the independent co-production *Poison Candy*, starring John Hurt, to be shown theatrically in all territories outside the United Kingdom as well as on television domestically. It has also been released in Britain on video (under the title *Little Sweetheart*). This was a one-off arrangement but spurred negotiations towards a permanent in-house deal for BBC films.

As yet, no such deal has actually been signed, but the BBC has made it clear that it intends to realise theatrical rights in its projects even if it cannot come to a satisfactory agreement with the unions. BETA's main argument is that amounts paid to those involved in feature film work should not place the BBC in a position in which it is



undercutting the rate for such work in the commercial sector, and that projects undertaken under any agreement must use solely BBC staff. In the meantime, it does not seem averse in principle to making one-off deals with the BBC—witness the case of Dennis Potter's long-awaited directorial debut *Black Eyes* (although this has been marred by controversy over the BBC's decision to use a freelance lighting cameraman). Undoubtedly, one of the attractions of producing feature films in the independent sector, with separate union agreements, is that it will enable the BBC to circumvent its own internal union structure.

When Mark Shivas arrived at the BBC he stated that one of his intentions was 'to make more films that have theatrical as well as television life and thus become an even greater part of the British film revival that is being celebrated everywhere,' an intention underlined by the refreshing and imaginative appointment of Lynda Myles, whose achievements include running the Edinburgh Film Festival in its most innovative period, co-authoring *The Movie Brats*, curating and programming the Pacific

Left: *Killing Dad*, Richard E. Grant, Denholm Elliott. Below: *Poison Candy*, John Hurt.

Film Archive at Berkeley, working as a film consultant at Channel 4, developing projects for David Putnam's Enigma Productions, co-producing *Defence of the Realm*, working as Putnam's European representative during his sojourn at Columbia, and, more recently, acting as a film consultant for BSB.

How does Lynda Myles feel about her move to television, especially at such an uncertain period in its history? 'It's a major period of transition at the BBC,' she explains. 'They're opening up to the independents and bringing in people like Mark Shivas, whose background straddles film and television. Undoubtedly, they've also been triggered by the fact that so much British cinema over the last few years has been so interesting; the BBC wants to be part of all that, but not just for selfish reasons. It wants to help the whole process along. I know that the BBC has been under a lot of pressure recently, but there's no sense of no-go areas, or limits that can't be crossed. And the chance to work with people like Mark Shivas, Alan Yentob, Jonathan Powell and Michael Wearing is very interesting, since they have been behind the television I've most liked over the last few years—things like *Edge of Darkness*, *The Price* and so on. Who I work with is very important to me; ever since Edinburgh I've realised the importance of having good people around me, people of a similar mind and with the same interests at heart.'

In the first instance all drama submissions—feature films, TV films, series, serials, soaps—will land on Myles' desk. She will then send on possible candidates to the relevant sec-

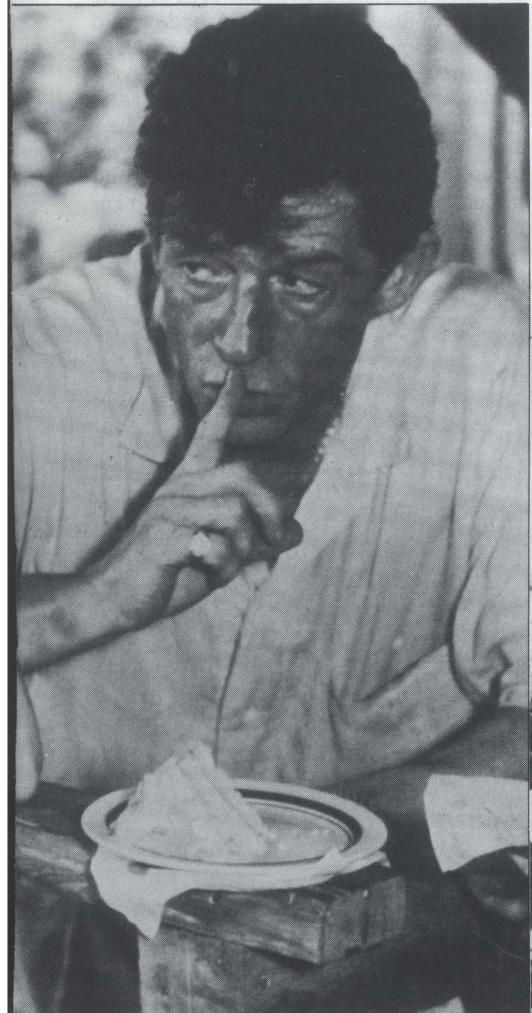
Tree of Hands, Helen Shaver, Lauren Bacall.

tions of the drama department, though keeping the features for herself. Although when we spoke she had been in the job for a mere eight weeks, she had already been sent 100 feature scripts, and had selected three as distinct possibilities. 'We're looking at films at the £2-3m level, or £4m at the very maximum. The most that we would put in would be £500,000. I'm really very open when it comes to the type of film we're looking for, but obviously it has to be completely compelling, something that really stands out. They've also got to be full-blooded movies, not cross-over products; I'm after movie-movies. The longer I work in production the more I think that the script is crucial, but I'm also going to pay particular attention to who is chosen as director.' Potential script-writers might like to know that the two recent British films she singles out as having that all-important movie feel are *A World Apart* and *Stormy Monday*.

Among the many to express pleasure at Shivas' and Myles' appointments is David Rose, Senior Commissioning Editor for Fiction at Channel 4 and, as such, responsible for Film on Four. As he put it, 'I've been waiting for the day the BBC would announce that they were getting into features, and I'm very glad indeed that they're doing so, because it can only be healthy for the creative talent in the industry.' It must also be something of a relief to see another funding body entering the field of film production, thereby making it seem a little less as though the entire British film industry rested on the shoulders of Channel 4.

Although an increasing number of the Channel's films have been granted the much sought after theatrical window prior to their television transmission, the Channel itself no longer plays quite such a dominant role in financing Film on Four as it did in the early days. As Rose explains, 'We provided 75 per cent of the budget on our first 22 films. But then the average budget was only £400,000. We can't do that today because rising costs have outstripped the Film on Four internal programme budget. There's nothing wrong with the budget, which has increased year in year out and accounts for 6-7 per cent of the Channel's programme monies. Indeed, the cost of many Films on Four compares very favourably with that of certain TV series, which can easily be up to £500,000 an hour. Suppose that we put £600,000 into a £1.2m film and that film is shown three times on the Channel—the cost works out at only £100,000 per hour.'

Hardly surprisingly, given the relative scarcity of potential production partners in the United Kingdom, the Channel has increasingly looked abroad



for co-production monies. 'We must take every opportunity that presents itself for co-operation,' asserts Rose. 'We all joked about the European Year of Cinema and Television and those endless seminars in which the same people kept coming together in different parts of Europe to try to define what a European film might be. But such questions are important, especially with the approach of 1992, and the ten media projects which have come out of all that discussion are quite excellent. We are also members of the European Co-Production Association, which includes representatives from Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland, Italy and Spain.' At the moment the Channel is involved in two Russian projects, new films by Ken McMullen and Eduardo Geddes in Portugal, Alain Tanner's *The Woman from Rose Hill* in Switzerland and Atom Egoyan's *Speaking Parts* in Canada, among others.

In Britain Rose has also found partners in certain ITV companies. Euston were concerned in *A Month in the Country*, and Granada in *Tree of Hands* and *Joyriders*. *Tree of Hands*, which also involves British Screen, is based on a Ruth Rendell novel and *Joyriders*, again with British Screen involvement, is the debut feature, set in Ireland, of director Aisling Walsh, a graduate of the National Film and Television School. The Channel is also engaged in a deal with TVS and HBO to produce *Joelito*, a film dealing with political oppression in Paraguay to be produced by Anne Skinner (of *A Very British Coup* fame).

In the long run, of course, a degree of uncertainty must hang over the future direction and prospects of Film on Four, as it does over the entirety of the Channel's operations, while the Government ponders the future of the broadcasting system in general. As Rose puts it, 'We're secure until 1992. But after that there are so many unknown quantities that it's difficult to judge their implications. Our policy at Film on Four is to stay as we are, but in the end we're rather in the hands of outside forces. However, the Board hope to achieve arrangements which will safeguard the Channel's remit, which is all-important if we are to continue as we do now. But at the moment we still don't really know fully what the Government's plans are.'

Although Rose testified to 'a very happy experience with Euston' over *A Month in the Country*, he also added that 'they've rather drawn in their horns in the film-making area' and that this particular relationship had 'slowed down a bit'. This brings us to the vexed question of the levy, as Euston were among the sternest critics of both the rumoured and actual changes mentioned earlier, and it is mainly their

unhappiness with these changes which has led them, for the moment at least, out of feature film production.

The levy was first introduced in 1964, as a form of super tax, once the ITV companies were showing healthy profits after a somewhat shaky start. Since its introduction, the method by which it has been calculated has been changed no less than seven times. The logic of the levy lies in the fact that the ITV companies are making private use of a scarce public resource, that is, a part of the broadcasting spectrum. Furthermore, they are making a profitable use of that resource by selling television advertising in a monopoly situation. Because of the absence of competition, they are considered as making more money for less investment and risk than other companies engaged in other activities, and for these reasons they are subject to a form of 'monopoly rent'.

At first the levy was charged on advertising revenues, but in 1974 this was changed to a levy on profits. This came about because of the volatility of advertising revenues in the early 1970s, which led to a situation in which some companies were paying the levy even though they were making losses. In 1986 the rate of the levy was reduced from 66.7 per cent to 45 per cent of 'leviable profits' (that is, profits left after the companies had deducted an allowable 'free slice' and had excluded profits from their non-domestic broadcasting operations) and an additional levy of 22.5 per cent was imposed on profits from overseas programme sales.

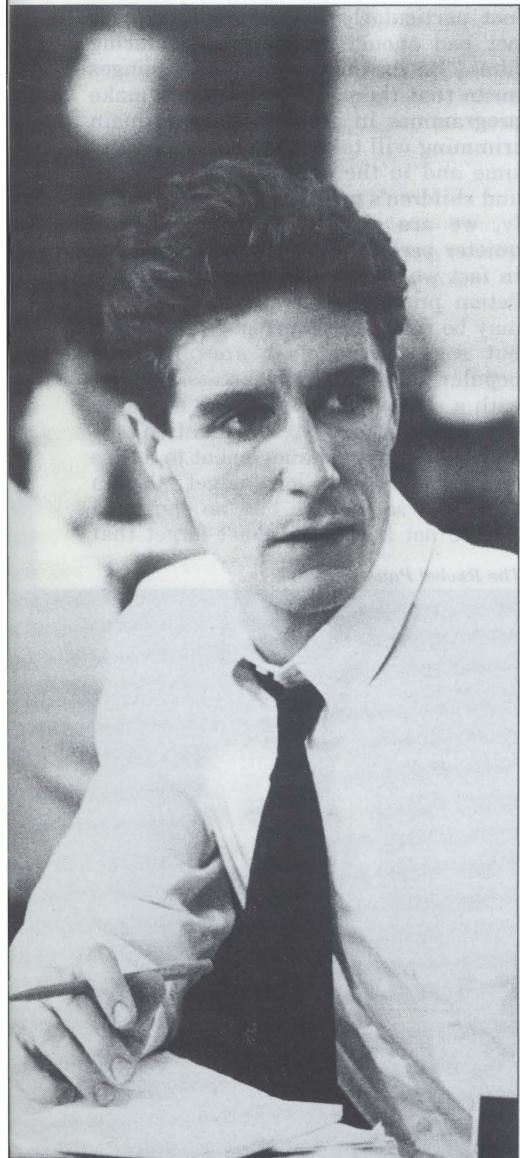
These changes, however, lost the Treasury some £19m annually in revenue and led to criticism from the Public Accounts Committee. The Treasury then lobbied for the levy to be charged purely on advertising revenue (as indeed it had been until 1974), while the IBA argued that it should be split evenly between advertising revenue and profits. In the event the Home Office seems to have won a small concession from the Treasury, in that in future the levy will take 10 per cent of net advertising revenues (NAR) and 25 per cent of British profits. The 22.5 per cent levy on overseas sales will be abolished. There will still be a 'free slice' of both revenue and profits, and the Channel 4 subscription will also be allowable against the levy.

At the moment ITV advertising revenues stand at about £1.55bn. Pre-tax profits for 1988 were around £263m. To take the example of just one ITV company, in the year to 1 October 1988, Granada announced profits of £30m, a rise of 44 per cent against the same period the previous year. On the other hand, in 1988 the companies paid a total of £62m in corporation tax (at 35 per cent), and £90m in levy. The various taxes paid by the companies accounted for some 57.8 per cent of their gross profits. In 1988 Granada paid £17m in levy, Thames £12.8m and TVS £12.4m.

Working out how, and at what rate, the levy should be charged involves striking a balance between ensuring an adequate return to the Treasury (and ultimately the public) from the franchise holders and, on the other hand,

Below: *The Tall Guy*, Rowan Atkinson, Jeff Goldblum.
Above right: *Dealers*, Paul McGann.





not pushing the levy so high as to make the holding of franchises unattractive or encouraging franchisees to cut costs by depressing programme budgets. In a different way, this too would hardly represent an adequate return to the public. In its defence, the Treasury would argue that the most recent changes to the levy simply restore the pre-1986 status quo, that ITV companies' complaints sit ill with previous boasts about 'licences to print money' and their present healthy balance sheets, and that while advertising revenues have nearly trebled over the past thirteen years the yield from the levy has not increased in real terms, as the following chart shows.

Levy and NAR (£m; 1985 prices)

Year	NAR	Levy
1965	82.6	21.6
1970	74.6	21.3
1975	69.1	8.8
1980	100.0	11.4
1985	144.0	1.8
1987	186.5	9.0*

Source: Nera

In their defence, the companies argue that as the present arrangements allow companies to write off up to 30 per cent of production costs against the levy, the changes remove a major incentive to invest in quality programmes and generally penalise efficiency. In August 1988, when the levy changes were first rumoured, Michael Grade warned the Broadcasting Press Guild that ITV companies were withholding 'crucial finance' from feature film investment, including *Film on Four*; and when the

Joyriders, Patricia Kerrigan (centre).



changes were finally announced, Leslie Hill, MD of Central, one of the companies which will be hardest hit by the new arrangements, announced that 'there is no question that this will affect investment in big-budget programmes.' A submission by the Association of Independent Producers to the Treasury put the situation in a nutshell: 'A tax on profits encourages expenditure and a tax on income encourages a reduction in expenditure in order to maximise profits. The current ITV levy on profits encourages expenditure on high-budget production. A levy on net advertising revenues will discourage expenditure on all production, in particular high-budget productions and films.'

What is beyond doubt is that the companies will be paying more revenue to the Treasury. It has been estimated that under the old system they would have paid £141m in 1990 and £163m in 1992, while under the new one they could be paying £181m in 1990 and £197m in 1992. Worst off will be those contractors with the highest proportion of revenue and those with high production budgets. Central is an obvious loser; it now pays £12m in levy per annum but could be paying £25.5m by 1990. Some estimates forecast rises of 40-45 per cent for LWT, Thames and Yorkshire, and an alarming 72 per cent for HTV. Those who stand to gain are high profit/low production companies like TV-am (hardly a recommendation for the new system) and smaller companies which may well find that the 'free slice' works to their advantage. Whatever the case, however, the ITVAs are considering cuts of £12m in network spending, and an ITV working party has estimated that a further £18m will have to come from profit reductions, cost savings and possibly cuts in regional programming.

Since feature films, like television drama, are a relatively expensive form of production they seem most likely to fall victim to the levy changes. This would be a pity, since television involvement in feature production has of late been something of a growth area. There are various possible reasons for this. First, in the wake of *A Room with a View*, etc, the world market for British features seems very buoyant. Secondly, the theatrical window is seen as important in raising a film's profile and thus increasing its chances of success on domestic television and in the international programme market. Thirdly, there are certain advantages to ITV companies if films are made under BFTPA as opposed to ACTT agreements. And finally, one should mention the recent agreement whereby English-language films made on a budget of £4m or less may be televised at any time after their theatrical release. Films exceeding this figure will be

subject to a minimum two-year tv holdback, although this can be waived by the Films on Television Committee, representing distributors, producers and exhibitors.

According to BFTPA chief Otto Plaschkes, 'There is no guarantee that this will attract increased tv investment in films. But there is a reasonable chance because it will give broadcasters the freedom to control the merchandising of their investment.' It may also be the case that television's increased involvement in theatrical features is a reflection of its increased commitment to drama as a whole. According to figures compiled by *Screen International* at the end of April, the production of feature-length films, mini-series and series was up by 38 per cent in the first quarter of 1989 compared to the previous year, while investment in tv drama for the same period was £43.61m compared to £26.05m. Bearing in mind David Rose's remarks, it's interesting to note that foreign co-productions increased by a staggering 300 per cent.

In the wake of the announcement of the levy details, there appears to be some disagreement about their possible effect on television-financed feature film production, although some of the more apocalyptic rumblings of last summer seem to have quietened down. There are also a number of films in production or awaiting release which pre-date discussion of the changes. *The Dawning*, which was released earlier this year, came from TV (which has decided not to set up its own film production arm). At the end of 1988, Scottish Television decided to set up Scottish Television Film Enterprises, and its first feature, *Killing Dad*, a black comedy starring Denholm Elliott, Julie Walters and Richard E. Grant, will be released later this year. Other partners in the project are the Film Cap Corporation of Toronto, the Sales Company and the ubiquitous British Screen. This particular film arm hopes to make five features over the next three years, all budgeted between £1.5m and £3m. HTV has recently announced plans for two features—*Mad Dogs and Englishmen*, an 'Ealing style comedy' with Mickey Rooney, and *King of the Wind*—while Thames has made the children's film *Danny the Champion of the World* with Portobello Productions.

Meanwhile, at the end of April major changes were announced at Granada. In 1987 the company had set up Granada Film Productions as an independent film company under production head Mike Wooller, formerly of Goldcrest. This, however, is now to be submerged by Granada Television's production division, which also operates a film-making operation under Director of Television Programmes Steve Morrison.

This was responsible for *The Magic Toyshop* and *The Fruit Machine*. Granada Film Productions' slate, at the time of the merger, included the aforementioned *Tree of Hands* and *Joyriders*, as well as David Hare's latest, *Strapless*. In development are *Growing Up in the Gorbals*, to be produced by Karel Reisz, *Perugia*, to be executive-produced by Mark Shivas and directed by Pat O'Connor from a Bernard MacLaverty screenplay, and *A Paper Mask*, adapted by John Collee from his own novel.

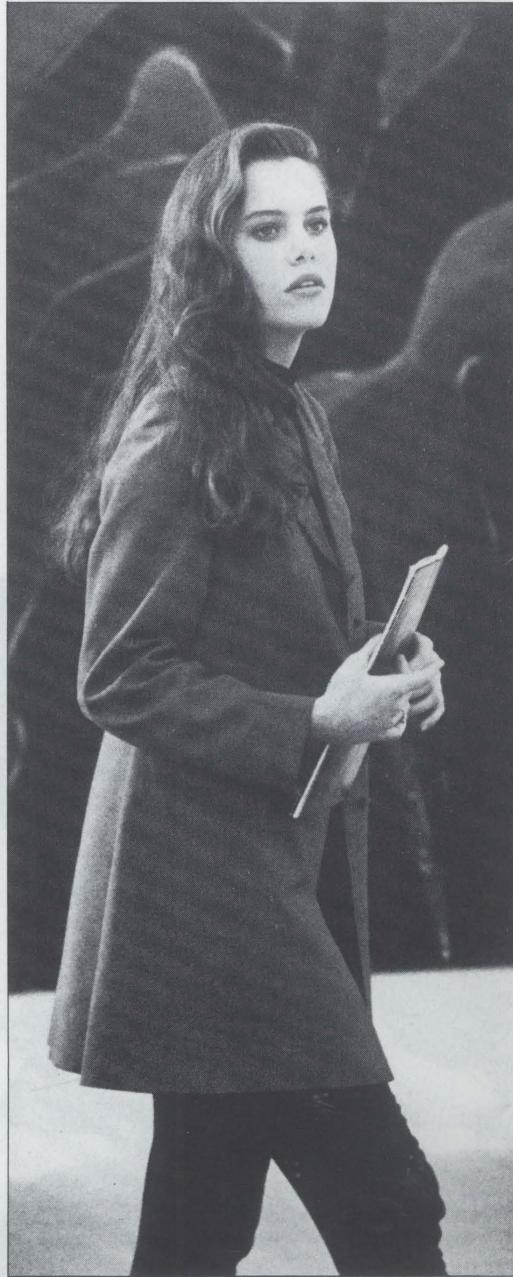
Granada is also putting some £750,000 over three years into British Screen (which is involved in *Perugia*) and has set its sights on BSB (in which it is a shareholder) as one possible outlet for some of its film output. Indeed, BSB is reported to have an involvement in *Perugia* too. In this context, it's also worth noting that BSB is a shareholder in Enigma and has set aside £4m to secure eight or so British theatrical releases at pre-production stage. The company has a stake in *Scandal*, the recent Lenny Henry film, and also Initial's adaptation of Martin Amis' *The Rachel Papers*.

This year Anglia announced that it was getting involved in feature production as part of a £16m drama package. Significantly, perhaps, Anglia's international tv sales operation ITEL is chaired by David Puttnam, who is also a member of the Anglia board. The company has stated that it wants to get into 'middle-ground' movies budgeted at between £4-5m and has appointed Brenda Reid, formerly of the BBC, to oversee the projects. In development at the moment are *Sin City*, a black comedy based on Wendy Perriam's novel about an ill-assorted female duo from Britain who win a trip to Las Vegas, and *The Disappearance*, to be directed by Mike Grigsby, here making his debut in features. Something of a fictional follow-up to the superb *Living on the Edge*, this follows the decline in fortunes of a woman whose husband suddenly vanishes; her previously affluent lifestyle gone, she discovers that there are no safety nets in contemporary Britain. According to Brenda Reid, 'The levy changes are an obstacle, certainly, but they're not the end of the world. One simply has to find other ways of raising the money. A producer needs to be ingenious, and if the Government's actions mean that the producer has to work harder that isn't necessarily a bad thing.'

A not dissimilar attitude prevails at LWT, which has been responsible for *A Handful of Dust*, *The Tall Guy* and the adaptation of Tom Sharpe's *Wilt*. Of these only the first was put together in such a way as to take advantage of the levy mechanism, which helps to explain why LWT's Nick Elliot, Controller of Drama and Arts, regards the changes as

'not particularly helpful, but certainly not bad enough to stop us producing films.' He continues: 'The levy changes mean that there is less money to make programmes in general. But the main trimming will take place outside prime-time and in the area of documentaries and children's programmes. Undoubtedly, we are about to enter a slightly quieter period in production terms, but in fact we may well see an increase in fiction production of all kinds. Fiction may be relatively expensive to produce, but some forms of it are also very popular. I want to make accessible films with a strong profile that will stand up well in the schedules. My intention is to keep pushing my management to let me make one or two low-budget films a year, and so far I've had no sign that they're not keen. And don't forget that

The Rachel Papers, Ione Skye.



the change in the levy system has some benefits—in particular the end of the 22.5 per cent tax on overseas sales, which will encourage exports.' Elliot's remarks reflect a populist approach to programme-making that is echoed in other areas of the company's production, and his point about the ending of the overseas sales tax makes one wonder whether this may facilitate the making of 'international' or 'mid-Atlantic' movies.

The most negative response to the levy changes has come from Euston, which, as indicated earlier, is quitting the theatrical business for the moment. Their involvement in this area dates as far back as 1976, with *Sweeney!*, based on the television series. This was followed in 1978 by *Sweeney 2* and by *The Sailor's Return*, which was intended for theatrical release but failed to find distribution. Over the last few years Euston has invested some £9m in feature production. In 1988 they signed a multi-picture deal with Rank Film Distributors, and the money from this was the first part of Rank's \$100m production fund to go into a United Kingdom slate. The only film which looks set to emerge from this, however, is *Dealers*, set in the London money market and starring Paul McGann, which was started before the levy changes were announced. Other Euston involvements have included *A Month in the Country* and two films which resulted from a financing partnership with the Samuel Goldwyn Company,

Consuming Passions and *Bellman and True*. An association with Palace has also produced *The Courier*. A victim of the levy changes, however, has been the Mike Newell project *Carrington*, scripted by Christopher Hampton.

According to Euston's John Hambley: 'The levy changes certainly make it more difficult to finance expensive product. They also put us more into the hands of co-financiers, especially American or continental ones. Our feature film production has now virtually dried up because this is the most expensive form of production. This was always something of a marginal addition to our activities, and was greatly assisted by the levy. We've been in features in a small way for a while, but now we're coming out. We'd love to do more, but we need the right arrangements and the ability to make the right deals. We clearly warned the Government last year that the kind of changes which they were proposing would affect features most adversely of all.'

Clearly, then, attitudes to the levy vary among those in television involved in feature production, depending on what films they want to make and the way in which their company as a whole stands to be affected by the changes. It also needs to be pointed out that there is some hope among the companies that the levy may soon disappear altogether, a point of view which may have been slightly encouraged by

The Courier, Cait O'Riordan, Padraig O'Loingsigh.

the reply which Douglas Hurd, at his NFT lecture earlier this year, gave to a question from the British Screen Advisory Council's John Chittock. After all, if the levy is a monopoly rent, what justification for it will there be in a situation in which the monopoly will have been resoundingly broken?

To quote from the Peacock Committee's report, 'If franchise contracts were awarded by competitive tender, the monopoly rent (or "licence to print money") would have been effectively eliminated and there would be no further need for the levy.' More recently, Professor Peacock has described the decision to accept the highest tender and to continue the levy as a percentage of NAR as 'an unfortunate mish-mash'. Rather more surprisingly, perhaps, opposition to the continuation of the levy in the new broadcasting environment has come from the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers, which in its response to the White Paper stated, 'We believe that this will have the unfortunate effect of causing advertising costs to rise even higher, and imposing further pressure on the programme budgets of each licence holder, where we want to see good quality programmes encouraged. We urge the Government to do away with the whole proposal for a levy from 1993 onwards. It would represent, in the new era of multi-channel competition, a tax on advertising.'

Whatever the justification for the changes to the levy, it does sometimes seem almost as if the Government is actively trying to discourage filmmaking in this country. After all, this is hardly the first such measure. After years of complaint from the Tory press about 'left-wing drama' on television and Norman Stone's ill-informed attack in the *Sunday Times* on recent British cinema for its alleged anti-Thatcher slant, such a suggestion is neither paranoid nor fanciful, and it is one which I put to David Rose.

'I've really no idea what are the Government's attitudes to the films we produce,' he replied. 'It clearly has a very strong attitude about the arts in general, television included, that they should stand on their own two feet and not rely too heavily on public funding.' This suggests that the Government's policies towards the film industry are more a result of its general economic thinking than of its ideological position. 'However,' Rose concluded, 'good writers and directors always question and challenge. This has always been the case, and has frequently led to them being accused, often inaccurately, of having a "left-wing bias". This is probably inevitable, but in my opinion the artist's questioning, challenging function is absolutely proper—and long may it remain so.'



C a n n e s 42

P E N E L O P E H O U S T O N

The reports and rumours at Cannes this year were not mainly about movies. Was it true that the new corporate proprietors of *Screen International* came down to see their acquisition in action, parked outside one of the largest hotels and came back to find their Mercedes minus all four wheels? Was it true that the gipsy pickpockets' tactic for this year was to sidle up to a mark with hands hidden under a newspaper, and that any gipsy purporting to be reading the *Financial Times* was especially to be shunned? It was certainly true that a brand new hotel shares its premises with a Christian Science church, an exotic combination which seems to smack more of California than of Cannes. And I didn't greatly doubt the reporter who came back from a safari to one of the grandest of the Riviera hotels with the news that it was full of people who ought to be in gaol.

Not the least of the virtues of *Jesus of Montreal*, Denys Arcand's film which shrewd tipsters at the end of the first week were backing for major honours, but which eventually had to settle for a mere jury prize, is that this is the sort of disorderly world it inhabits. Arcand's hero, a sympathetic young actor named Daniel (Lothaire Bluteau), of suitably fiery but wispy appearance, plays Christ in his own unorthodox version of the Passion Play, staged on the bluff overlooking Montreal. Predictably, not to say inevitably, 'reality' begins to echo drama; but what is less predictable is both the range the film manages to cover (religious humbug; media humbug; the amazing behaviour of audiences; the fumbling and bumbling of bureaucracy in the rundown city over which the mountain serenely floats) and the humour and sheer energy of Arcand's script.

The sharpest scene finds the devil, a natty show business lawyer, tempting Daniel with the kingdoms of the media. Television talk show; autobiography; theatre? It doesn't really matter since, as Daniel is reminded, there is always so much more media space than there are people with the wit to fill it. Daniel drives out the money-changers of television in a scene of fine havoc at the shooting of a ghastly commercial. Eventually, he is fatally stunned when the Cross topples during a scuffle as the police try to halt the performance, and

is treated unavailingly at a Jewish hospital after a city one is found to be going down for what looks like the last time in a sea of bureaucracy and over-crowding. Arcand is not above taking a sledgehammer to some of his targets, but a little ironic overkill is understandable when the intelligence is running fast and free. And polemic is not allowed to overwhelm character, including that of the actor who wants to fit 'To be or not to be' into the *Gospel According to St Mark*; and does so.

Splendor takes an altogether kindlier view of the media world and is one of several Italian contributions to the cycle of wistful pictures about the death of cinemas. Marcello Mastroianni, as the son of a travelling showman, inherits the little provincial Splendor, which opens in 1938 with *Scipio Africanus*, that celebration of African conquest, but some time in the 50s is playing puzzled host to a touring Soviet delegation. With his trusty projectionist and usherette, he is still there for his cinema's crumbling decay. In a flashback, Mastroianni comes back from the war to find *It's a Wonderful Life* playing, and the climax of the film is a dripping but rousing rerun of the Capra fantasy, with the old patrons of the Splendor returning to occupy their seats and prevent the dismantlers from unscrewing them, while snow falls from the rafters and the ageing local critic

leads a chorus of 'Auld Lang Syne'. Wouldn't life be so much nicer if it was more like the movies? Ettore Scola is seldom an exciting director, but he's a dab hand at a somewhat traditional, well-upholstered style of European cinema, and *Splendor* slides down very comfortably. We are all soft-hearted about old cinemas; we just don't want to spend much time in them.

Also easy to take, Percy Adlon's *Rosalie Goes Shopping* features Marianne Sägebrecht as a lady who looks and speaks and smiles like a large soft-centred confection topped with whipped cream, but comports herself as a human computer programmed with implacable greed to stock up on worldly goods. With her seven odd children and innocently infatuated husband, a cropduster pilot afraid that he can no longer see to read the aircraft controls, she lives in Stuttgart, Arkansas, a land of open prairies and bright, childish primary colours. From a little light forgery and manipulation of credit cards, Rosalie moves swiftly on, hacking into the bank's computer system, going corporate, threatening to go multinational. Everything, more or less, is duly confided to her priest (Judge Reinhold), who emerges from the confessional and takes to the financial pages. The main pastime of Rosalie's family appears to be merrily chanting the refrains of TV commercials. Adlon's latest, however, is

Mystery Train: Youki Kudoh, Masatoshi Nagase.



not so much a satire on consumerism as a fantasy about a barracuda disguised as a cream bun.

Rosalie could be seen as a wily European battenning on American innocence. Jim Jarmusch has the trick of looking at his own country as some kind of fantasy landscape seen through foreign eyes, and *Mystery Train* (which was, incidentally, Japanese-financed) keeps up the process. A neatly structured trio of yarns, linked by a place, a seedy hotel in Memphis, and a sound, an early morning gunshot, the film opens in captivating style, with a Japanese boy and girl, she perky as a cricket, he lugubriously expressionless, arriving to pay homage at the shrine of Elvis Presley. The second tale, in which an Italian widow meets a talkative girl, is delicately slight; the third, about three ineffectual bad hats, covers well-worn ground. For some reason, many people seemed irritated beyond reason by *Mystery Train*; it's a marking time sort of picture, certainly, fairly self-indulgent, if that is not a contradiction in terms for a minimalist, playing with its setting. But the combination of a calculated quirkiness (the joky pair of black receptionist and bell-boy, arguing the time away in the company of an outsize model cockroach) and the bleak, beckoning night street caught by Robby Müller's camera sets down the film's not negligible markers.

Britain, disappointingly, had no film in competition. The likeliest runner, Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V* (setting aside any possible surviving resentments about Agincourt), got no further than a market screening; no press allowed, though the astute Alexander Walker somehow slipped under the wire. But *Venus Peter*, Ian Sellar's first feature, flew the flag encouragingly in the 'Un Certain Regard' section. The story of a small boy growing up in the company of a great many women, an old grandfather and some wistful fantasising about an absent father, the film is also about wide skies and the legends of the sea. A picture which places itself firmly in Fife by some dialogue, but was

actually shot in the quite dissimilar location of Orkney, might seem slightly shaky about its own sense of place; though no one is likely to quarrel with these seascapes, or the changing lights they bring with them. The small boy does not drown when he might, because or in spite of his persuasion that he's a boat: an illusion worth preserving.

Another first feature in 'Un Certain Regard', Patricia Mazuy's *Peaux de Vaches*, is also about place as much as people: the dour, unpicturesque farming country of northern France. The 'bad' brother (Jean-François Stevenin) returns to the farm after ten years in prison; the 'good' brother has been modernising everything in sight, no doubt a major beneficiary of the CAP; good brother's wife (Sandrine Bonnaire) is not too happy with her life. The tensions are predictable, but just as Cold Comfort Farm seems to be looming, the director pulls back, lets the landscape work for her, stages a scene that is genuinely sharp, or as spare as the final leave-taking. Again, the scale is modest, but as with *Venus Peter* you feel the director needed to make this film, rather than just any film.

With Bernard Blier, there is usually a sense that his films are shouting somewhat, to command attention. *Trop Belle pour Toi!* has Gérard Depardieu as a BMW salesman who hardly seems to feel the need to sell many cars, but lives in considerable style with his exquisite wife (Carole Bouquet, once Buñuel's object of desire) and family. The applecart is upset, however, when he falls for Josiane Balasko, the plain and dumpy office temp. A neat role reversal, one of Blier's bright ideas, is then tricked out with some not very Buñuelian snatches of fantasy and time-juggling, a few jokes and many an emotional confrontation. The French loved it; the rest of the world seemed luke-warm.

Also in competition, Jerry Schatzberg's *Reunion* is a study of the rise of Nazism, from a solid—perhaps almost too solid—Harold Pinter script. Two schoolboys, one from the officer class, the other the son of a Jewish doctor,

become friends in Stuttgart in the early 1930s. Nazi uniforms appear in the streets; a bullying new teacher arrives; the Aryan explains to his friend that probably it is all for the best, and that in time Hitler will no doubt come to distinguish between good and bad Jews. The Jewish boy, however, makes off to America, to return forty years later in the person of Jason Robards to rediscover the past and pay a moving visit to his parents' grave. The fate of the other boy is apparently intended to come as a surprise, though given his type and background one could see it looming a mile off.

Decent if suety, *Reunion* fits alongside a film like Shohei Imamura's *Black Rain*, about people suffering radiation sickness after the 'black rain' of Hiroshima. The conclusion, I'm told, is affecting, but I'm afraid that I didn't stay the course, after a surely ill-advised attempt to reconstruct the horror itself, the journey through the newly devastated city, followed by rather too many of those episodes of scatty village life which leave one reflecting that there is still indeed a gap between East and West.

Still more rebarbative is the view of suburban Sydney in *Sweetie*. Thin, whining Karen is nervous about most things, including trees; fat, whining, retarded Sweetie flings appalling tantrums; their father, also whining, is a buffoon, and the family home looks as though it has been thrown off the back of a truck. Jane Campion won a big reputation at Cannes three years ago with her short films, and the combination of an oblique, rather affectless shooting style with characters pushed to such extremes has to suggest she has more in mind than the kind of parody of *Neighbours* which might be dreamed up by someone suffering a surfeit of bile and soap opera. Immediate impressions, however, are not flattering.

The categories at Cannes have become somewhat perplexing of late. *Sweetie* looks like a film snatched from the Directors' Fortnight, where it would fit more easily, perhaps in the interest

Jesus of Montreal: Lothaire Bluteau (centre).



Maria von den Sternen.



of giving that elusive up-to-date look to proceedings in the main auditorium. Meanwhile, in the Fortnight itself, Wayne Wang, the chronicler of Chinese-American life, is back with *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, about a young couple trying to cope with life in New York's Chinatown in the 1940s. A rather quaint piece, bustling, busy, a little woebegone but with everything in the end turning out for the best, it has somewhat the feel of a 40s movie. Also in the Fortnight, and yet another of Cannes' many first features, was *Maria von den Sternen* by Thomas Mauch, one of the leading cameramen of the New German Cinema. A young unemployed teacher sets up house in a strange little observatory in the middle of a stretch of overgrown greenery, among gardens overlooked by the many windows of surrounding flats. More time is spent in looking at the windows than in watching the stars; and particularly in following the comings and goings of Maria, the local siren who seems to have the whole neighbourhood by the ears. Mauch's film has an odd, dreamy quality, partly the result of its setting, the sturdy, ramshackle little structure squatting in

the trees. The film may take its time to go nowhere in particular, but it imposes its own atmosphere: a green thought in a green shade.

Jonathan Rosenbaum writes elsewhere about Rivette's *La Bande des Quatre*, seen in the market here and masterly in its view of the tensions, off and on stage, at an all girls' acting school run by a steely Bulle Ogier. Other directors describe shifting relationships. But when Rivette is dealing with acting in every sense, as he is here, the interplay becomes tangible and immediate, so that you feel you are getting there before the director, watching a pattern emerge of its own accord. Or rather, as with the three card trick, you are allowed to feel that you are seeing it all, tempted into gullibility. One can lose patience with Rivette; but not this time.

Also in the market, Edgardo Cozalinsky's *Warriors and Captives* takes an idea from one of Borges' tiny tales (*Story of the Warrior and the Captive*) and extends it into an account of frontier life in Argentina in 1880. A line of Fordian army posts faces out into Patagonia and unconquered Indian territory;

a gallant colonel brings his French wife (Dominique Sanda) from Paris; Leslie Caron commands the local brothel; an old soldier woman tends a garden at the fort and watches as the colonel's wife tries to tame, convert and rescue a young European woman who has been kidnapped by the Indians and chosen the savage life. Classic situations, leading to a finale of hallucinatory violence, should be more compelling than they actually are. Perhaps Cozalinsky is almost too cerebral a film-maker, laying out the blueprint, not quite contriving to build on it. But some fine detail remains, and the sense of unresolved mystery that caught Borges' imagination from his grandmother's tale.

A last thought from Cannes. Each year, critics seize on all those market films with captivatingly daft titles—*Lobster Man from Mars*, *Mutant of the Bounty*, *Rabid Grannies* and the rest. But has anyone ever encountered one of these films in real life, in a cinema? Or are they simply titles *du festival*, thought up perhaps by teams of gnomes laughing wildly at their own jokes, and do the films later go out to face the world in drabber plumage? □

C A N N E S

D E R E K M A L C O L M

Even in the year that Gilles Jacob had expressed his desire to encourage 'the new cinema' in the competition, it seemed rather foolhardy of Wim Wenders and his fellow jurors to give both the Palme d'Or and the Best Actor award to Steven Soderbergh's *Sex, Lies and Videotape*. This first feature undoubtedly deserved something for its sheer accomplishment and inventiveness. But it is really quite a small film, in scale as well as budget, and the modest and likeable Soderbergh was only telling the truth when he surmised

at the awards ceremony that it might be 'all downhill from here'.

The film is virtually a four-hander, in which a yuppie husband and wife, dissatisfied with one another, attempt to find new partners in the wife's sister and the husband's college friend respectively. And while the husband's adventure is sexually liberating, since his sister-in-law is totally freewheeling in her general attitude to physical liaisons, the wife is faced with a young man who finds it as difficult as she does to express himself physically. Instead,

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he lets the videotape of the title do it for him.

Soderbergh's comedy of modern manners is sharp and ironic enough to avoid predictability, and certainly well enough played and directed to keep the quartet from getting tiresome. It also succeeds in saying something about the difficulty of personal commitment. But its last half-hour is not entirely convincing, and its resolution ambivalent. You do not feel that this posse of uncertain psyches has learnt much of a lesson, even if they should have done so. Still, Soderbergh's essential lack of pretension wins one over, as does the refreshing honesty of his spiky screenplay, and Andie MacDowell, as the wife, seemed to me to deserve the Best Actress award rather more than James Spader, as her erstwhile new partner with the videotape, did his crown as Best Actor.

Melancholia: Mouchette Van Helsdingen, Jeroen Krabbe.



Sex, Lies and Videotape: Andie MacDowell.



But, of course, the Best Actress award was more or less a foregone conclusion for Meryl Streep, whose brief sojourn in Cannes was so interrupted by journalists asking stupid questions and the international paparazzi trying for revealing photos that she vowed never to go near the place again. Perhaps the award will change her mind.

The film-maker with almost certainly the most justified complaints that he was left out of the jury's calculations was the black American, Spike Lee. He had contributed a very lively third feature to the competition in *Do the Right Thing*, thus erasing the memory of the disappointing *School Daze* and reminding us of the pawky talent of *She's Gotta Have It* (which one British newspaper amusingly recalled as *She's Gotta Habit*).

Do the Right Thing spends much of its two hours exploring the black community of Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn before reaching its flashpoint, on a very hot New York day, with a race riot caused initially by a tiny incident between an Italian-American pizzeria owner and one of his more lippy black customers. The film is a bit overextended but it is played with great panache by its mostly black cast, among whom is Lee himself as an unpoliticised but eventually conscience-stricken helper at the pizzeria. And its central theme that America is not just one big, happy multi-racial society but a pot waiting to boil over, at least in its vast and over-populated urban areas, is surely very near the truth.

China, piqued at the failure last year of Chen Kaige's *King of the Children* to find the favour expected after *Red Sorghum*'s Golden Bear at Berlin, had only one film included this time, and that was an unofficial entry, surprisingly made not in China but the Pyrenees, and with European financial backing. But *Chine, Ma Douleur* proved one of the successes of the Directors' Fortnight, being the amusing as well as touching story of a young boy's incarceration in a correction camp during the Cultural Revolution. He has been

caught playing the wrong sort of Chinese music on his gramophone in an attempt to attract the girl next door. The film looks at its array of characters, young and old, with considerable warmth and there is a splendid sequence when the local Party organises a magic show for what it fondly thinks is a group of loyal peasants, only to find that the applauding watchers are all enemies of the people from the detention centre.

Which brings me to *Ganashatru*, Satyajit Ray's contemporary Bengali version of Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*, shown out of competition. This was made during the Calcutta winter entirely in the studio, to save Ray from undue exertion after his heart bypass operation, and is very much a chamber work, eschewing all flourish. It has an excellent cast led by Soumitra Chatterji, eloquent veteran of a dozen Ray films. There is also a particularly fine musical score by Ray himself. But it is a very enclosed piece, rather in the vein of Lumet's *Twelve Angry Men*, and not as fluent as his best work.

What is certain, however, is that Ray, even though he produces an optimistic ending very unlike that of the play, has successfully underlined the relevance of his undertaking at a time when pollution, religious fanaticism and corruption seem as endemic as ever in the world at large. Few other films in the festival looked so thoroughly in tune with the times. And very few used words rather than images to express their feelings.

Late in the festival came one of those revelations that had almost everyone talking in only slightly guarded superlatives. This was Alejandro Jodorowsky's *Saint Blood*, which a colleague very accurately described as a mixture of Buñuel, Fellini, *Freaks* and *The Hands of Orlac*. One hopes the film can survive such a potent description, and also that Jodorowsky, having delivered up his first film since *The Holy Mountain* back in the early 1970s, will be allowed to continue his adventurous rediscovery of surrealism. *Saint Blood*

Chine, Ma Douleur.



is no masterpiece, but this story of the wife of a Mexican circus performer who has her arms hacked off by her enraged husband and proceeds to exact a bloody revenge through the agency of her son, looks quite extraordinary and is directed with an eye for detail that is often astonishing. The blood, however, is likely to put a good few off it, including possibly our Censor.

No one in their right minds, however, could object to Patrice Leconte's *Monsieur Hire*, a succinct and beautifully structured summation of the Simenon story about male obsession that seemed made for Michel Blanc and Sandrine Bonnaire. That was a small but perfectly formed pleasure which contrasted with the sentimental bombast of Giuseppe Tornatore's *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*, much applauded at both its press and public showings. Here is another small town of the postwar era, and another flourishing haven of dreams like the cinema in Scola's *Splendor*. This time our hero is a young boy who makes friends with Philippe Noiret's fond projectionist; and the film, though undeniably skilful and attractive to watch, milks every cliché in the book where nostalgia for the great days of cinema is concerned.

Lino Brocka's *Les Insoumis*, made in the Philippines with foreign help, tells us in no uncertain, and rather melodramatic, terms that the military under Marcos' more attractive successor is still up to its old dirty tricks. It is an angry rather than a good film, which is apparently quite likely to get this courageous director into trouble back home.

Finally, those in Britain and elsewhere who have nothing but admiration for the work of the Artificial Eye company, in consistently promoting the sort of films which might otherwise get little chance to shine, were relieved at the competence of *Melancholia*, the first feature directed by Andi Engel, founder of Artificial Eye.

Melancholia, though cast in the form of a thriller, is essentially an expression of its maker's sentiments about the failure of the radical left in the last two decades. Its central character is a depressed art critic who was once on or near the barricades but now gets an offer from a rich patron to go off to Tuscany and write the book that's in him. At that moment, however, he gets another offer, which he also accepts. An old revolutionary friend tells him that a Chilean torturer is arriving in London for a conference on medical matters, and says he wants him killed.

The film is the kind of drama that has more bones on it than flesh, which means that you can make out of it what you will. But it is directed with the kind of spare gloss that does not wholly preclude argument, and what it says undoubtedly expresses the dilemma faced by many who once thought that people would respond better to ideals than to comfort and complacency, and found that they had badly misjudged matters.

-F R A M E D -

Peter Cowie



PHOTOGRAPH BY SARA HAMILTON

On 3 January this year, having turned 49 on Christmas Eve, Peter Cowie became a salary-man for the first time in his life. Known till then as a critic and as editor and publisher of the *International Film Guide*, Cowie joined *Variety* as its new European manager, with a brief to identify its role on the Continent and the means of getting there by 1992. As part of the deal, the *Film Guide* itself will now come out under the *Variety* banner.

It looks on the surface like one of those mid-career moves that make no sense to the outside world. What can Cowie, author of a biography of Ingmar Bergman, expert on Scandinavian cinema and advocate of the work of Francis Ford Coppola, have in common with a journal whose literary aspirations (as reflected in a recent comment on *Dangerous Liaisons*) stop at 'stealing into 42 boudoirs for sexy \$145,000, 15th lap, after \$212,324 in 14th at 48'?

The answer, surprisingly, is quite a lot. By family background, inclination and sheer unflagging energy, Cowie is a unique combination of writer, businessman and advertisement salesman—an aesthete who never takes his eye off the bottom line. Americans can relate to somebody like him.

Born in 1939, Peter was the son of Donald Cowie, who founded the Tantivy Press after the war to publish books on specialist interests like antiques and farming. Peter grew up watching his father do the paste-up for his most successful title, an Antiques Year Book, so the practical side of publishing held no terrors for him.

Educated at Charterhouse, Cowie became editor of the school magazine, the *Carthusian*, but at that time showed no interest in film. He can date his conversion precisely. It happened in 1958, when he went with his father and grandmother to the old Royal Cinema in the Edgware Road to see *I Am a Camera* because Cowie père was an Isherwood fan. But it was the second half of the bill that bowled him over. It was *The Seventh Seal*, which drove Cowie's grandmother out of the cinema because there was 'too much talk about death' but opened his eyes to an art form of whose existence he had hitherto been largely ignorant.

Cowie went up to Cambridge in 1959 and quickly found fellow enthusiasts. Charles Barr became a close friend; so did Peter Graham, who widened Cowie's horizons by introducing him to *Cahiers du Cinéma*. There was another film buff there, too, at that time: David Frost. He edited *Granta* and Cowie became its business manager. Between them they published a special issue on cinema, which shared the same sense of discovery as work also being done at that time in *Oxford Opinion*. 'You felt you were in on something expanding at the speed of light,' says Cowie. Later, he worked under Philip Strick, films editor of *Varsity*, and succeeded him when he left. They ran two full pages a week on

cinema without advertisements and Cowie did everything from editing to make-up and proof reading.

He came down from Magdalene College, Cambridge in 1962 with a '2.1' in history and convinced his father that there was a future in film publishing. Father made son a gift of the Tantivy Press as a vehicle with which to get started. Cowie had his sights set on what, in 1963, became the first of the Tantivy *International Film Guides*, now in its 27th year. From the start he declined to turn the product over to a design house, 'which would have wrecked the finances', but did it himself. A tight rein on money is one of Peter Cowie's most celebrated traits.

Cowie had begun writing about films while he was at Cambridge. In 1960, he approached *Films and Filming*, then edited by Peter Baker, and wrote what was to be the first of many pieces for that publication—a profile of Spencer Tracy. Baker made him a studio correspondent, and on four days a month, young Cowie was whisked round the sets by studio car and got to see the tedious reality of how films are made—so different from academic theory. It's a practical grounding that has stood him in good stead and saved him from becoming too highfalutin. That, too, goes down well with his new employers.

As a critic he responds chiefly to those films that help to define the language of cinema, such as *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* and *L'Avventura*, although he admits that it took more than one viewing to persuade him in each case. And he is frank about blind spots—Godard, Ruiz and Greenaway. What he misses, in the cinema of the 1980s, is the commitment to the art of the film that was uppermost in the 1960s. He likes to quote Lindsay Anderson's observation that the 60s are both a threat and a reproach to the 80s.

At the same time, there are contradictions in Peter Cowie. He can be a champion of both rigorous intellectual cinema and its polar opposite. 'Intensity of feeling,' he says, 'means more to me than brilliance of technique. I respond to emotion in the cinema. I like Bergman's films of the 50s, for example, more than the later cerebral ones. And I can identify with directors like Truffaut and Cassavetes.'

Cassavetes? There's a name that wouldn't be on the tip of every critic's tongue nowadays. What Cowie admires in him is not the American flavour, the improvisational hit-or-miss quality of early films like *Shadows*, but what he sees as a strong European undertow in his work—linking him to Welles, Coppola, Hitchcock, Kubrick and Michael Curtiz, all firm favourites.

Welles has been a particular influence on him. He was so struck with the use Welles made of what is now the Musée d'Orsay in *The Trial* that he resolved to write a book about him. The snag was that Welles never gave interviews, but Cowie wangled one by a white lie when the great man was staying at the Ritz, pretending to have

a message for him from Spain, where Welles was to film next. They subsequently corresponded extensively.

An interesting, though far from definitive book came out of it. In his books on Welles and Coppola it is hard not to feel that Cowie is trying to appropriate them into a tradition which they only partly fit. His approach to Coppola, for instance, breaks down because the recurring theme that Cowie claims to find in his work (crisis within the family) maddeningly refuses to apply to many of the films—*Apocalypse Now*, for instance, and *Peggy Sue Got Married*.

Looking at the films in this way now smacks of an older, rather fusty critical method that Cowie seems not to have outgrown with the years. By the same token, is his regret for the ebullient 1960s, when there was a thirst for knowledge he does not find among filmgoers today, a sign of encroaching age?

All this adds up to one very good reason why Cowie made the leap into management at the start of the year. He would never, perhaps, say so—not even to himself—but he may be approaching the end of a rich and productive period as a critic. The relative failure of his Coppola study as a critical assessment, coupled with its incisiveness as an account of what went wrong with the commercial structure of the Zoetrope studios, suggests that it marked a watershed in his career. So the *Variety* offer may have come at an opportune moment. 'After 25 years,' he says, 'you feel you need a new challenge. If it had come a year earlier or a year later I probably wouldn't have done it.'

His major contribution in those 25 years has been to put film publishing on the map. Along with Ian Cameron at Studio Vista, he pioneered the notion of film books in this country. He was in at the birth of *auteur* studies in Britain and throughout the 1960s and 1970s the name of Tantivy led the pack.

At the hub of the operation was the *International Film Guide*, planned originally as a small book about the state of art cinemas, but expanding into an ambitious survey of world production. Cowie says that he never imagined this would develop into the engine-room of the entire book. His aim, he says, is to have something from every country in the world but without a political slant.

The *Guide* was more influential overseas than at home, which has always niggled him. For many years Cowie focused in each edition on five directors—an idea lifted from Wisden, along with a strict taboo on second appearances. 'After a hundred I got browned off,' says Cowie; but Zanussi was one director who claims to have once got a visa on the strength of it. When he pointed out his own name on the cover as one of the directors of the year, he sailed through immigration. Till then, he reports (perhaps apocryphally) they had taken him for a washing machine salesman.

Did Cowie ever have film ambitions of

his own? Apparently not; he always knew his limitations. He is a writer, not an artist—just as, though he loves music, he cannot play. The composers he admires most are those such as Berlioz and Sibelius who broke the mould. This interest in music encouraged him to start an *International Music and Opera Guide*, one of a fistful of Tantivy guides on various topics, including cycling and athletics.

These publications essentially mirrored Cowie's own enthusiasms (he's a keen cyclist and, these days, an armchair athletics fan—I know all the world records and distances for athletics'). But although some were relatively successful, none sold as well as the *Film Guide* and they were discontinued when it became clear that the profits from the film book were going to pay the salaries of those working on the others.

One publication that was a huge success, though, was a Scandinavian Guide, not least because Cowie was able to persuade major companies, such as the airline SAS, to take 2,000 copies. This reflects Cowie's long and amicable association with Scandinavia dating back to 1963, when he went to Sweden to write a story about *The Silence* for the *Financial Times*. He fell immediately under the Swedish spell, became friendly with Jörn Donner, Bo Widerberg and other directors, and won a deserved reputation as the leading British writer on Scandinavian films. To this day a third of his friends are Scandinavian.

He later felt equally at home among the Dutch and for a time blazed a trail in writing about Dutch film-makers such as Paul Verhoeven years before they won international reputations. Cowie, indeed, has always felt a greater rapport with foreigners than with the British. He did some lecturing in the United States in the early 1970s and found that he liked the American eagerness for new things. 'They respect knowledge on a specialist subject,' he says, 'and if they feel you have new ideas they'll come up and listen.' But he prefers to work for the Americans in Europe.

Long-standing *Variety* staff knew there was a keen wind blowing as early as the Berlin festival in February; in the interests of a fresh perspective, Cowie overturned traditional territorial preserves and reassigned them for the festival to films other than from their native countries. It caused a rumpus that took even Cowie by surprise. Who did he think he was? A cottage publisher grown too big for his boots? Or the coolest thing that's blown through the *Variety* hothouse? Time will tell, but in the meantime, in his neat Newman Street offices, Cowie sharpens his pencils and writes himself a memo listing what he plans to do that day—conscientious, compulsive, rather Scandinavian really.

ALAN STANBROOK

INSTAL LATIONS

You are standing in front of nine television monitors. They are raised off the ground and stacked above each other in rows of three. On the screens there appear to be three sorts of black-and-white images, but as each one shifts to an adjacent screen after only a few seconds, it is at first difficult to be certain. Two pairs of the images look like either local broadcasts or recordings of similar signals. One screen is blank.

On the other four screens are images of you as spectator shot from a camera attached to the monitors. But instead of these being live, as you expect, there is a built-in time-delay. Moving your hands, turning to one side, smiling (as the display seems to encourage you to)—these simple actions are played back at two separate moments after you are aware of doing them. The images continue to jump in a cycle around the screens, but your recognition of the delays, and of their difference from the now, prompts a small epiphany, a pleasing moment of heightened awareness.

Wolf Vostell's *Heuschrecken*.

You gaze fascinated, enjoying the sense of yourself in another space and time.

This is *Wipe Cycle*, a now classic video installation first constructed in 1969 by the American artists Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider. Earlier this year, a version of it faced visitors to Cologne as they entered 'Video-Skulptur: retrospektiv und aktuell', a major exhibi-

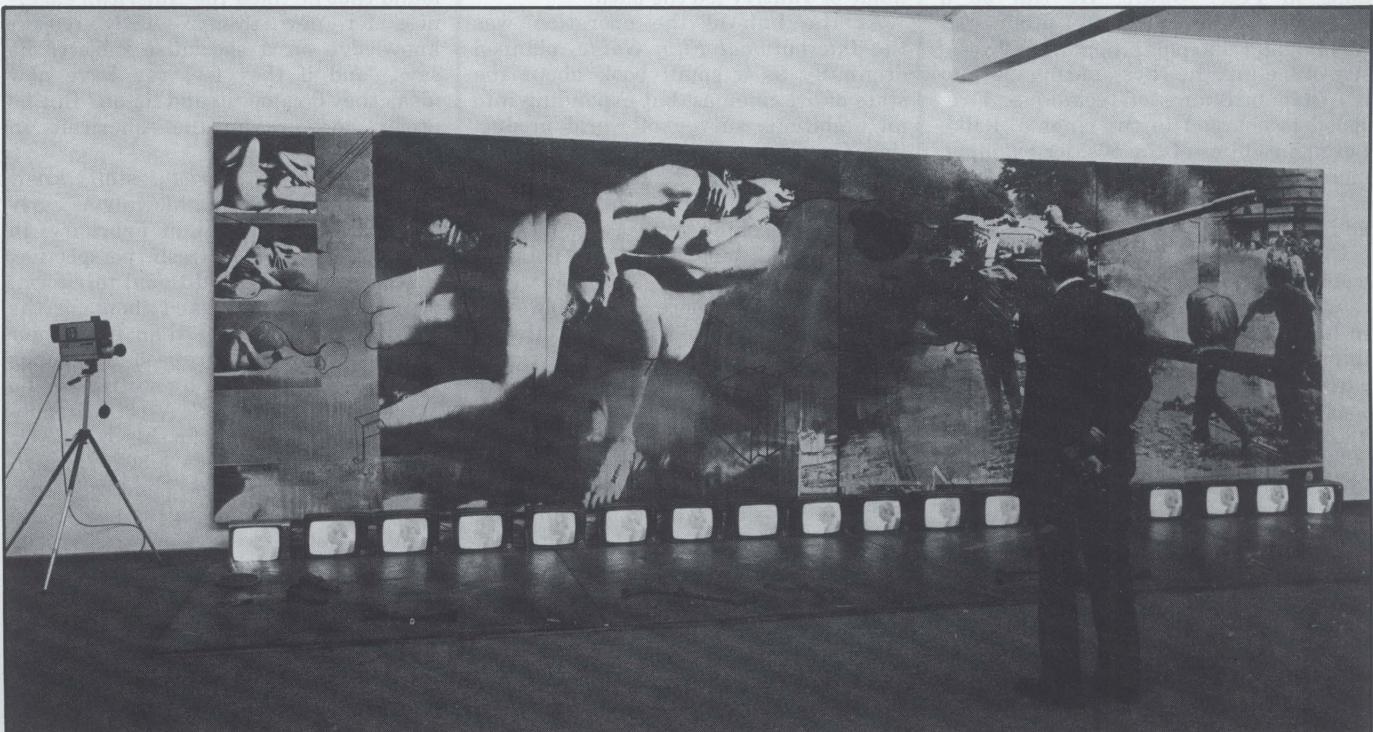
J·O·H·N W·Y·V·E·R

tion of art-works incorporating video images. Organised by Wulf Herzogenrath at the Cologne Kunstverein, and at three other locations in the city, the show was an ambitious endeavour to present both elements of the history of video sculpture and today's state of the art.

For more than two decades, alongside and often overlapping with the avant-garde tradition of video as art on a single screen, artists have been working with the physical presence of moni-

tors, cameras, projectors and images. As the exhibition demonstrated, it can be tricky trying to separate the terms video sculpture and video installation, but the former is usually applied to discrete, small-scale objects which incorporate screens, like Helmut Mark's *Skulptur* (1985). This angular concrete arch is supported on one side by a small monitor displaying abstract animated graphics. The work's dominant concerns are those of fine art, of material and form; and for this critic, it possesses—like many comparable pieces—little of the complexity and resonance of the best of the larger-scale video installations. These, like *Wipe Cycle*, invite and require the participation of the spectator.

The idea of video sculptures and installations was initiated back in 1963 when both Wolf Vostell and Nam June Paik exhibited television sets that had been defaced, damaged or modified to show images other than those being offered by broadcasters. And a strong part of the impetus of this vein of video



art today remains a concern to challenge the viewer's accepted notions of what it means to watch television.

In the Cologne show, Vostell's mammoth *Heuschrecken* (1969/70) demonstrated this in a work that combines painting, photography, sculptural objects, a video camera and 18 monitors. On the wall is a large canvas showing, to the left, a couple making love, and alongside them protesters facing a Russian tank, almost certainly in Prague. Over these two main images the artist has sketched and doodled, and along the bottom is a row of monitors. In front of the screens is the fossilised detritus of our society, a blackened tennis racket, a wallet and a scattering of bones. As you walk in front of this potent combination, the camera off to one side relays the image of your face on to the monitors, implicating your gaze in the private and public events portrayed. The morality and the politics of voyeurism, and of the detached stare that television invites, become uncomfortably present.

As was apparent at last year's exhibition at London's Hayward Gallery, Nam June Paik's video installations can also be both spectacular and critical. But his towering *VV-W (V-Pyramid)* (1982/89) illustrates the problems of trying to turn as seductive a medium as television against itself. This tapering pile of monitors on a triangular base flashes out a fast-cut melange of broadcast images, edited so as to reduce everything to instant, meaningless media buzz. The absence of meaning might be the message, but Paik fails to demonstrate any distance from this all-too-apparent contemporary condition. In other works, his sense of wit and ironic juxtaposition offers a more complex experience, which manages both to celebrate the medium and at the same time to question it.

Antonio Muntadas' *The Board Room*.

Of the Cologne show's other explicit critiques of television and its meanings, Antonio Muntadas' *The Board Room* (1987) was the most provocative. Enclosed in a separate, carpeted space, under subdued lighting, is a grand oval table surrounded by comfortable leather chairs. On the walls are portraits of a dozen distinguished-looking men. Similar rooms must exist in office buildings throughout the world, except that here the mouths of the portraits are replaced by tiny monitors. The portraits are of the Pope, of Ayatollah Khomeini, of American television evangelists Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell. The screens show these men in action, taking part in world affairs, inspiring you to live a better life and appealing for your donations. Religion, communication and power, both secular and sacred, are brought together in a disturbing combination.

The influences of television are as central to the narrow domain of video as art as they are to our own culture, but artists have also used the possibilities of the medium to explore quite other concerns. As video cameras and recorders became more widely available during the second half of the 1960s, the relay of a live or near-live image was recognised as offering new ways of, in a sense, making visible the abstract entities of space and time. *Wipe Cycle* is in this respect particularly successful. So too is Bruce Nauman's *Live Taped Video Corridor* (1969), in which you walk down a narrow gap between two high walls towards a pair of monitors. Placed one above the other, these appear to be showing the same image of the empty corridor. But as you approach, the back of your head and body enters the top picture. The live image from a camera behind you is contrasted with a taped shot of the space when unoccupied. The effect of such a simple conjunction is

strangely dislocating, even threatening, especially as you can feel trapped in the constricted corridor.

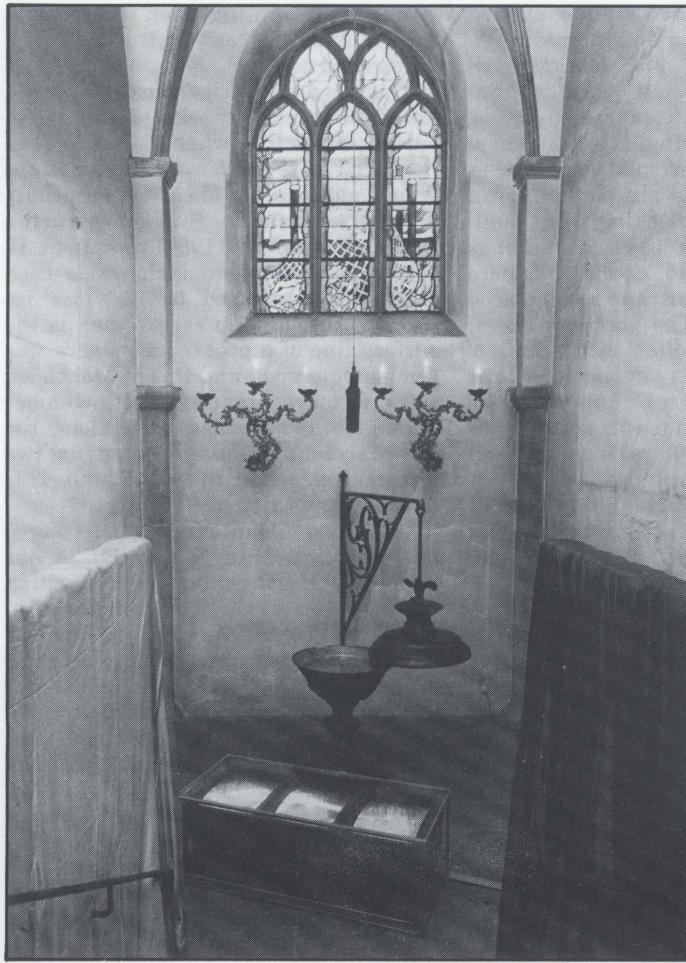
There is a simplicity, almost a purity, about these early works that is particularly attractive when they are seen next to more elaborate installations which put similar ideas to essentially decorative effect. Studio Azzurro's flashy *Il nuotatore* (1984) comprises 12 colour monitors placed alongside each other and connected to 12 video recorders. Halfway up each screen is the surface line of a pool (each camera was semi-submerged), and this is broken as, in perfect synchronisation, a swimmer passes down and then back along the row of screens, seemingly occupying two or three screens at the same time. This is video art as kitsch.

Television monitors are of course becoming increasingly familiar in our world. No longer content with invading only our homes, they are ubiquitous in shops, in the underground, in coaches, in post offices and banks, and in museums. This spread of flickering screens is one element contributing to the recent growth, previously unimagined, of a market for installations such as *Il nuotatore*.

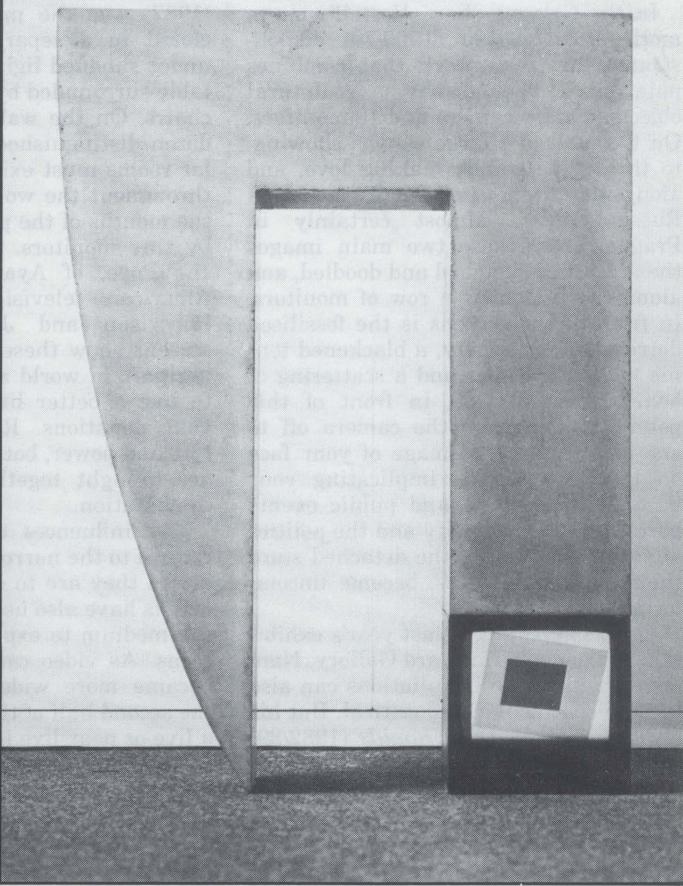
Corporations are apparently beginning to recognise that a work of video art is probably more appealing as the centre-piece of an entrance lobby than a contemporary sculpture of rusted iron. Museum curators, too, and even private collectors, are becoming aware that installations are a more attractive option than the purchase of individual videotapes. Not only is a video sculpture or installation easier to display than a sequence of tapes (although maintenance makes it more trouble than a painting); it is also something that, unlike an endlessly reproducible tape, can retain and increase its value.

As with the production of individual





Ulrike Rosenbach's *Or-phelia*.



Helmut Mark's *Skulptur*.

tapes, the mounting of installations has to date relied largely on grants and institutional sponsorship. The lack of such support in Britain is one reason why so few artists here, apart perhaps from David Hall and Tina Keane, have been able to work with the form in an ambitious way. (The selectors in Cologne chose not to include a single British video artist.) Jeremy Welsh, Andrew Stones and Zoe Redman were among those who exhibited installations at the 'Video Positive '89' festival in Liverpool in February, but each of their works was on an intimate scale, and none came close to the breadth of ideas and imagination expressed in the best pieces shown in Cologne. This may change as, alongside tapes looking increasingly to television for finance, installations find support from the fine art marketplace.

Among the attractions of installations is that, seemingly unlike experimental film and single-screen art video, they can have an enormous popular appeal. In Cologne, *Wipe Cycle* obviously engaged and stimulated a stream of disparate spectators, and nearby small crowds gathered to watch each demonstration of *Pfft* (1982/83), created by the Dutch artist Servaas. A close-up of a man's face appears on a screen mounted on its own pillar just above the heads of the viewers. Anchored in front of the monitor is a feather, which seems to respond as the man purses his lips and blows 'through' the screen. As you watch, there is something delightful

about recognising the impossibility and absurdity of such an apparent connection between the world of the audience and that 'inside' the monitor.

Perhaps neither installation demands that much of the viewer, and *Pfft* is indeed art video's equivalent of a one-line joke. Both have the instant appeal of an arcade game, although such a comparison is hardly adequate for the subtleties of *Wipe Cycle*. In another of the Cologne exhibition's locations, two less obviously accessible installations also attracted numerous and enthusiastic spectators.

Most of the show was mounted in two large galleries designed for the display of art. But Gary Hill's *Crux* (1983/87) and Ulrike Rosenbach's *Or-phelia* (1987) demonstrated how installations can draw meaning from and animate in unexpected ways the spaces in which they are displayed. Both were shown in the Kunststation St Peter, a spacious church which although it is still used for Mass has been adapted for the presentation of contemporary art.

The three horizontal monitors of *Or-phelia* were placed together in the baptistry, next to a resplendent font. The screens together show a watery non-naturalistic outline which the title helps identify as the artist floating among the weeds. This is overlaid with a flow of tiny organisms, which enhance the vulnerability and pathos of the image. For this viewer at least, it proved an affecting image of ecological protest.

Nearby is *Crux*, hung in a side chapel, with its five monitors suspended above an altar. Each screen is placed where the head, hands and feet would be fixed for a crucifixion, with each one playing a tape of the appropriate element of the artist's body. The screens are synchronised and, from what appears behind each hand or foot, he appears to be clambering through a country landscape and then entering a ruined building. Any sense of hubris, however, is offset by the quizzical, almost amused look on the artist's face, as he struggles to make his way with five miniature cameras attached to his body. It is the absence of the body that one is immediately made aware of, and then, in a way comparable to the effect of *Wipe Cycle*, the work forces on you a related sense of the presence of your own body. Again there is that small epiphany, that jolt of recognition and revelation, which prompts further scrutiny and thought.

Crux and *Or-phelia* are works of considerable intellectual sophistication which, to judge from random observation of those watching on one afternoon, seem able to speak meaningfully to a broad audience. Their contemporary equivalents in literature, in the fine arts and in film all too rarely enjoy such a privilege. Even the idea of an avant-garde art form that is popular is a problematic one. But perhaps, as the installations described would seem to demonstrate, it is also one which offers immense possibilities.

Astra Watch

The Astra satellite, owned and operated by Société Européenne des Satellites, moves in geostationary orbit 22,300 miles above Zaire. It carries 22 transponders, each capable of relaying one television channel, and six of these are held in reserve for emergencies. Of the 16 channels which will normally be in operation, eight were working at the time of writing, and another was about to begin.

Statistics in the world of satellite television—whether concerned with capital costs, audience size or advertising income—are even more notoriously slippery than in most areas of life. Moreover, in connection with Sky (much the largest element in British satellite operation so far) there tend to be at least two sets of figures for every item, one used by the Murdoch organisation, which owns Sky, and the others by the rest of the industry. This is less suspicious than it sounds since many of these figures are still projections. For example, the honest answer to the question 'How much will they have to spend before moving into profit?' is 'It's anybody's guess.'

With that proviso, these figures offer a rough guide to what is involved:

Sky programme costs for first year	£125m
New buildings	£15m
Promotion	£20m
First-year revenue	£10m to £25m
Probable expenditure before achieving profit	£500m to £700m

In April the *Financial Times* (whose parent company, Pearson, is a partner in BSB, the competitive satellite system due to open in autumn 1989) began a small market-research operation which will report each month on the state of the satellite television market.

On the basis of telephone interviews with 4,000 people, the first month's review concluded that there are now about 58,000 dish aerials in Britain capable of receiving Astra satellite signals. This is in broad agreement with the Murdoch estimate of 50,000 to 65,000. Though a relatively tiny figure, it is said to show that dish aerials are selling (at around £325 for equipment and installation of the remote-control type) faster than colour TV sets, video recorders or compact-disc players in their comparable year of development.

CHANNEL NO.	NAME	PROGRAMME TYPE	OPERATOR	HOURS PER DAY
1	Screensport	Sport	W. H. Smith	9
4	Disney	Children's	Sky	Opening soon
5	Lifestyle	Daytime programmes for women	W. H. Smith	5
6	Landscape	Scenery & sweet music; no speech	W. H. Smith	Varies
8	Sky Channel	Light entertainment	Sky	24
9	Eurosport	Sport	Sky	14
12	Sky News	News & current affairs	Sky	24
15	MTV	Rock videos	W. H. Smith	24
16	Sky Movies	Feature films	Sky	10

In addition, some of the Astra channels are available in at least some of the 200,000 British homes which are linked to cable systems. Thus there may now be 250,000 homes capable of receiving at least some satellite programmes. The FT survey found that 3.7 per cent of all households said they would definitely instal satellite TV, with 15.1 per cent saying 'probably'. Earlier in the year, Logica predicted that there would be 6m to 8m dishes installed in Britain by the end of 1996: one home in three.

Being the possessor of an Astra satellite dish means being visited by nephews and nieces whose appetite for rock videos on MTV is insatiable. It means suspiciously casual requests from friends who work in television to 'just flick through the channels for a quick look'. And it means (if you already have a video recorder) not two but three remote control units, containing—in our case—a total of 89 buttons.

Initially, it also means far more time spent in hunting through the channels, now 13 altogether, to see what is on. True, it is not yet as bad as living in an American city with, say, 60 channels where it can take literally half an hour to zap through them, by which time most have moved on to different programmes.

But even with 13 channels you do sense the law of diminishing returns coming into effect. When the BBC ran Britain's only channel, every single programme was worthy at least of consideration. By the time Channel 4 was introduced, many viewers began to feel that the very act of choosing was becoming too time-consuming. With 13 channels there is a feeling that there are so many programmes on tap that no particular constituent can really be very important, and it is easier than before to leave the set switched off.

This is not to say that everything offered by the Sky channels, and the others on the Astra satellite, is rubbish, nor that the system lacks advantages. Anybody who has lived even a short time in the United States knows that you very soon come to rely on Ted Turner's 24-hour Cable News Network (CNN) to deliver news, night and day, within minutes of switching on. The idea of having to wait for television news until six o'clock, or ten, begins to seem very old fashioned. That applies in Britain too, now that Rupert Murdoch's Sky News offers bulletins every half hour.

It is also pleasant to know that there is a channel offering nothing but films so that—between four in the afternoon and about one in the morning—there is



Lifestyle: host Jessy Raphael.

always a movie of some sort to be watched. However, although the original scheme was to provide this channel 'free' like the other Sky services (in other words, financed through the supermarket checkout where we pay for the advertising budgets on consumer goods), Mr Murdoch has been obliged to revise that plan. Later this year the movie channel signal will be scrambled and we shall have to pay a subscription of £144 a year for a 'smart' card, like a plastic credit card, to unscramble it. A similar card, or even the same one, will probably be used for the Disney channel.

Taking it channel by channel in the order they appear on Mr Sugar's Amstrad set-top receiver, here are some initial reactions to satellite television, five weeks after having it installed.

1 SCREENSPORT

This runs from about 3 in the afternoon until midnight and appears to specialise in the tabloid end of the sporting world. For the first couple of weeks, no matter when I switched on, they seemed to be showing the World Ice Speedway Championships in which four madmen tear round a frozen track on spiked wheels and hefty kneepads. It took several days to discover that there was no need to endure the frightful babel of commentaries in different languages since, by repeatedly pressing the 'Audio' button on the keypad, you can call up separate commentaries in German, French or English over the same pictures. Screensport is transmitted all over Europe.

For the next couple of weeks, whenever I switched on, they seemed to be showing the sort of all-in wrestling that even ITV has now given up on Saturday

Eurosport: basketball.



afternoons. Though it appeared to be coming from somewhere abroad, many, if not most, of the 'contestants' (who might more accurately be described as tumblers, and expert ones at that) appeared to be British.

I have also seen baseball, golf and tenpin bowling on this channel.

5 LIFESTYLE

Lifestyle operates from 9 in the morning until about 2 in the afternoon. Like Italian channels, it transmits its logo (a butterfly) all the time, superimposed somewhere on the picture. Content seems to consist almost entirely of old and very cheap series bought off the American stockpile (*Edge of Night*, for instance, a soap opera which began in 1956, and *Search for Tomorrow* which began five years earlier) interspersed with studio-based series. These specialise in chat, advice and, above all, cooking: there is *Wok with Yan*, *What's Cooking* and *The Microwave Cook*. The entire channel appears to be aimed at a stereotype of womanhood, which you might have thought had ceased to exist in about 1959, but perhaps advertisers know better.

6 LANDSCAPE

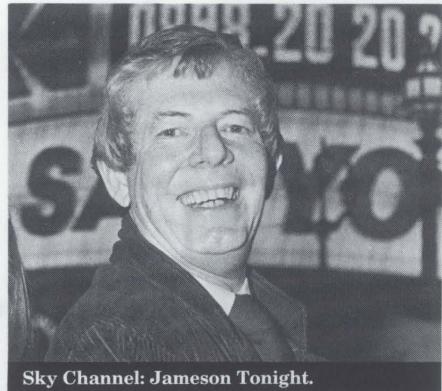
When you describe this channel to your friends they do not believe you. It consists entirely of pretty pictures—a train travelling through a snowy landscape, massed penguins on an ice floe, molten lava pouring down a mountain—with a music track but no words. The music ranges from Philip Glass's 'Koyaanisquatsi' via Prokofiev and Saint-Saëns to David Roach's 'Love Is'. Every three minutes or so the name of the music is shown on screen. Every half hour or so they provide a telephone number where you can order the music on LP, cassette or compact disc. Not only does Landscape run on Astra's Channel 6, it is also 'borrowed' by the Sky Channel as a sustaining service from 12.30 at night until 5.30 in the morning.

8 SKY CHANNEL

Sky Channel is a remodelled version of the general entertainment channel which Rupert Murdoch ran for several years across Europe, losing tens of millions of pounds in the process. In January 1989, most of Sky's European offices were closed.

The British version opens each weekday with a *European Business* programme at 5.30 a.m., goes on to 2½ hours for children, and then—from 8.30 in the morning until 12.30 at night—provides a light entertainment schedule heavily laced with half-hour shows from America and Australia. For example, during April:

- 10 a.m. every weekday brought *The Sullivans* from Australia
- 12.55 p.m. every weekday brought *General Hospital* from the USA
- 1.50 p.m. every weekday brought *As the World Turns* from the USA



Sky Channel: Jameson Tonight.

3.15 p.m. every weekday brought *Family Affair* from the USA

5 p.m. every weekday brought *The Young Doctors* from Australia

5.30 p.m. every weekday brought *Three's Company* from the USA

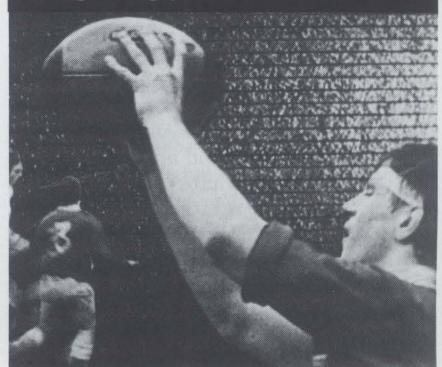
At weekends this heavy diet of soap opera is varied with some sport, pop music and (at 6 on Sunday mornings) America's evangelical *Hour of Power*. There is also an hour of bought-in documentary on Tuesday evenings. Virtually the only daily series produced by Sky itself are two studio chat shows. In *Sky by Day* at 10.30 each morning disc jockey Tony Blackburn and Jenny Hanley interview 'personalities' and introduce a recipe, a keep-fit spot and DIY tips; and in *Jameson Tonight* the professional Cockney offers an embarrassingly uninspired imitation of *The Johnny Carson Show*. Sitting at a desk copied from Johnny's, with a sofa at right-angles copied from Johnny's, backed by a window copied from Johnny's, Del boy fails utterly to copy Carson's American wisecrack style. In its place he offers the homespun sentimentality of the British tabloid press at its most cloying.

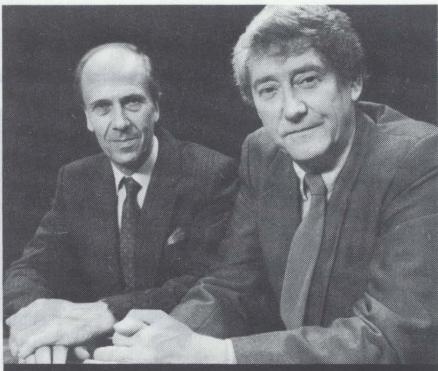
9 EUROSPORT

This is the quality end of the sports business: a channel put together by a consortium of European public-service broadcasters including the BBC. Their experience, contacts and sheer professionalism show. Shortly after installing the Astra dish, I was hooked by their series on European cycling, and later became fascinated by their coverage of the ice hockey world championships.

Their mix of events is genuinely international. On Tuesday, 2 May, for example their schedule included:

Eurosport: rugby.





Sky News: Tebbit vs. Mitchell.

Swimming ... East Germany vs. Russia
Soccer Brazil vs. the rest of the world
Golf from Singapore
Ice Hockey from Sweden
Tennis from Forest Hills, USA
Motorcycling ... the Spanish Grand Prix
Furthermore their commentators are not, or not usually, of the hysterical type who seem to believe that the world will end if they stop talking. They tend, rather, to be in the old BBC mould—confident enough to remain quiet when necessary.

12 SKY NEWS

A high-ranking BBC executive recently confided that this channel appeared to be doing 'a perfectly sober and respectable' job in covering the news; his way of admitting, I suspect, that there is not, as some feared, any attempt by Mr Murdoch to 'do a Sun' and produce a tabloid version of the news for television.

So far they seem to have rather fewer camera crews on the road than a fully-fledged national and international news organisation might wish; and there is a tendency to include more Australian stories than most British news programmes would choose (especially 'quirky' ones). Yet the general impression is, indeed, of a responsible and professional job being done. The actual business of presentation is, if anything, disappointingly similar to every previous British news programme, a fact which is emphasised by the daily feeds from the NBC *Today* programme where presentation is almost like a parody of American habits.

The channel's output does not consist entirely of news. There are bought-in programmes on health and entertainment, science and technology, and two studio talk shows originated by the

channel itself: *Target* in which MPS Austin Mitchell and Norman Tebbit grill somebody in the news (and occasionally each other, which can be more amusing and sometimes more informative), and *The Frank Bough Interview*.

Bough sits at an odd-shaped table, with one of those night-time-skyscraper cityscapes behind him, and interviews his guests much in the manner that we came to know so well on *Breakfast Time*. He is, perhaps, a little more tough and domineering than he used to be; he was admirably abrasive when dealing with Geoffrey Johnson Smith's claim that there was no difference of opinion between Mrs Thatcher and the West Germans over arms reductions and that everything was hunky dory. Short of laughing in the politician's face, Bough could scarcely have made his scepticism clearer. It is an entirely conventional programme, however, and could hardly be called fresh or different.

On the other hand, *Target* (for which Neil Kinnock did such a magnificent PR job by sacking Austin Mitchell from the Shadow Cabinet when he took the Murdoch shilling) could be described as the one truly original programme to appear anywhere within the Astra operation. In one sense it is simply another topical discussion programme, but it differs fundamentally from others in having two interviewers and one interviewee, and in its clear assumption that the interviewers will not merely reveal but positively exploit their political attitudes. Mitchell tends to suffer from logorrhea, but both men are good value and *Target* is the one satellite programme which has already become a regular fixture for me.

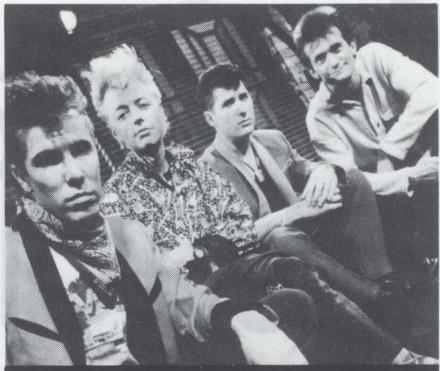
15 MTV

This channel is like a never-ending version of *Top of the Pops*, consisting as it does of rock numbers performed in front of gyrating teeny boppers, interspersed with rock videos. When the channel was launched in the USA it became the preserve of teenagers. Now it seems to be favoured largely by the 8-12 age group. For the adult of average intelligence, it is fascinating for 3 minutes and boring after 10.

16 SKY MOVIES

Five or six movies are run every day, often they are shown twice a week, and sometimes they stay in the schedules for several weeks. If the current offerings are representative of what will be available after scrambling and subscription is introduced (and it would seem like poor marketing if they were not), I doubt whether our household will be paying £12 a month.

There have been a few titles which you would never expect to find on the terrestrial channels—*Nine ½ Weeks*, Ken Russell's weird and wonderful *Crimes of Passion*, and *Aliens* for instance—but there are rarely more than two films a week which we would



MTV: Ray Cokes and the Stray Cats.

want to see, and in most cases they can be hired from the video shop for £1.50 and screened at a time of our own choosing.

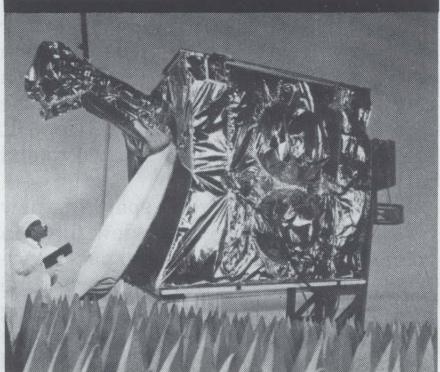
Being an Astra satellite viewer in the spring of 1989 is rather like being a member of a secret society: most people have no idea what you get up to, but imagine it to be far more exciting than it really is. If you do meet a fellow initiate you enthusiastically compare notes, but out of earshot of others who would not understand.

Will dish sales take off and will satellite viewing become a craze? Those who do decide to buy will almost certainly wait until they can compare the Astra/Sky operation with BSB's offerings. When they do, the comparison is likely to seem like the television equivalent of Woolworth's and Marks and Spencer, or the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Mail*.

Given that the British have long been rather fond of their existing terrestrial television services; that they do not (unlike the Americans) need a new technology to give them a clearer picture; and that there is little in the content of the satellite programmes—yet, anyway—which is noticeably different from terrestrial programmes, even if they are arranged differently, the best guess is that the rate of expansion will be very slow.

Of course that is what was said about video recorders, too, and the British took to those with unequalled enthusiasm. But then we use VCRs not, mainly, as an alternative to watching terrestrial television but as a way of watching more. The British use them chiefly not for playing rented videos, but for time-shifting *Mastermind* and *Coronation Street* and I have a hunch they will continue to do so.

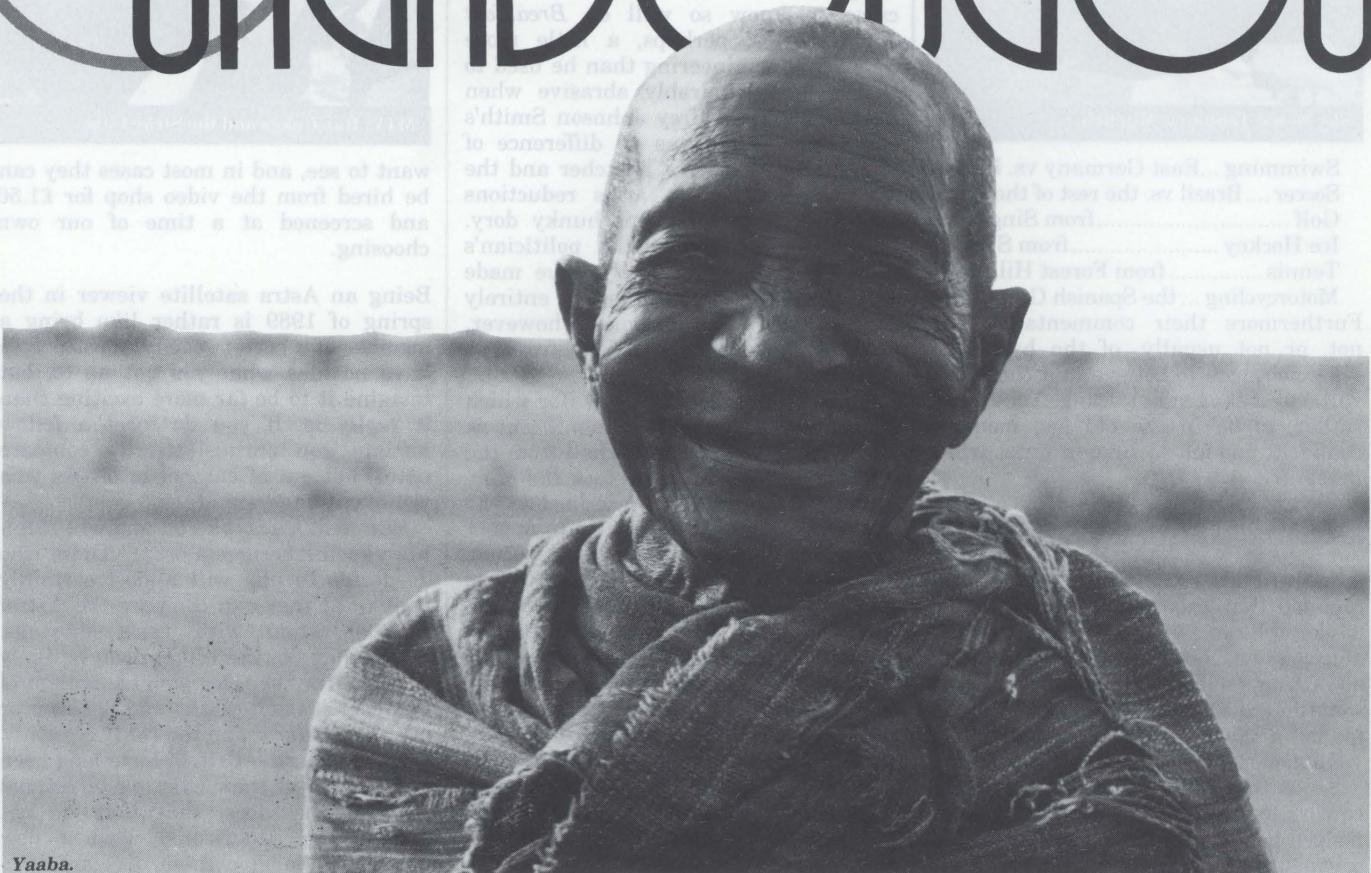
The Astra satellite.



MTV logo.



UAGADOGOU



Yaaba.

Ouagadougou is the capital of Burkina Faso. If I were to add that the country used to be called Upper Volta, it's still quite likely that you couldn't find it on a map. It's even less likely that you can pronounce it.

There's a name for the mania engendered in the locals here by years of that response. Observers of the French colonial experience have spoken of the 'sub-alterity' complex—an imagined state of being irredeemably different and lesser for having been born in a far-flung outpost of a colonial empire. In all fairness, a mere two weeks of the hot, dusty routine of daily life in Ouagadougou would give anyone a complex. The city's an ideal setting for that great civic esteem-booster of the post-colonial age, the film festival. And, every other year for two weeks, Ouagadougou becomes the cinematic capital of a continent when it plays host to the Pan-African Film Festival (FESPACO). It is well and truly the film festival to end all others.

Only in Ouagadougou's spanking-new open-air cinemas can you view films in comfort as large fruit bats pass overhead with only inches to spare. One director was dissuaded from swimming at his hotel when he was told that the pool's underwater lighting system had

shorted out, leaving it a deadly electric field. In the past, foreign delegates have been obliged to work on the country's national railway. The visiting journalist here is confronted with the unusual prospect of paying for his own drinks for a fortnight.

WILLIAM FISHER

REPORTS ON 'A BEACON FOR . . . AFRICAN CULTURE'

At the same time, FESPACO provides an opportunity to observe with complete immediacy the role that film can play in the life of a country. Because of the festival's presence, this tiny resourceless nation boasts more than the region's most developed cinema; Burkina Faso is a beacon for all sub-Saharan African culture. At this year's FESPACO, the country dominated in both quantity and quality of entries by offering a handful of technically accomplished full-length parables about village life in West Africa. The event is utterly unlike

any other festival, too, in that it seems genuinely to succeed in uniting an entire continent—one more difficult to unite, perhaps, than any other.

'In Europe,' Malian director Cheik Oumar Cissoko told me, 'the cinema is a luxury. Here in Africa, it's a necessity.' His view is shared by many film-makers who argue that it is impossible for the continent to develop its beleaguered and disparate economies without also developing its collective consciousness through the independent self-image created by an indigenous cinema.

The comparison with Europe bears closer scrutiny. Council of Europe and EEC initiatives notwithstanding, film-makers in Europe typically think of themselves first as French, German or English; they usually refer to themselves as 'Europeans' only when a quota or a budget needs filling. Because of the differences in scale and resources between the film industries of Europe and those of Africa, African film-makers have been obliged to organise their efforts on continent-wide terms. And their allegiances are perhaps less national (or even tribal) than they are linguistic. Centuries of colonial domination were as much cultural as economic. Film-makers here—tragically, perhaps—are identified by the rest of the

world (and often by themselves) as 'Francophone' or 'Anglophone' in the same breath as they are identified as 'African'.

The African cinema of the late 1950s and early 60s was little more than the work of a few isolated creators. In sub-Saharan Africa they were located principally in Senegal, the centre of a strong oral narrative tradition and the cultural capital of what was formerly French West Africa (thanks in large measure to the influence of its president Léopold Senghor, himself a poet and member of the Académie Française). In 1955-56, the Senegalese film-maker Paulin Vieyra made two shorts, *It Was Four Years Ago* and *Afrique-sur-Seine*, often referred to as the first 'African films'. The next watershed date is 1966, when Vieyra's countryman Ousmane Sembène produced the first feature film, *The Blackwoman from ...*, which won top honours at the Carthage festival. (Sembène had already made two notable shorts.) Soon afterwards, others like Med Hondo in Mauritania, Henri Duparc and Désiré Ecaré in the Ivory Coast, Souleymane Cissé in Mali and another handful of film-makers in Senegal directed their first features. All these countries, of course, were once French colonies.

In the remainder of sub-Saharan Africa developments proceeded more slowly. Of the former British colonies, Ghana took the lead with a small number of feature films, mostly popular melodramas and musicals. Ditto for Nigeria. Kenya produced only a few films, most strongly influenced by the commercial Indian cinema.

A significant stage for the African cinema was the 1971 nationalisation of the film industry in Algeria, another former French colony. Other nations followed suit: Senegal, Benin (also a former French colony) and Tanzania (formerly British) imposed a government monopoly on cinema in 1974, as did Madagascar (French) in 1975. Meanwhile, African film-makers gathered regularly in the cities of Carthage, Mogadishu and Maputo for screenings and conferences.

The first pan-African development for the cinema was the creation in 1979 of a distribution network, the Interafrican Consortium of Film Distribution, intended to be an African 'common market' for the cinema. All its members—Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Guinea, the Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Niger, Togo, Benin, Cameroun, Gabon, the Congo, Chad and the Central African Republic—were countries whose official language and cultural affinities remain French.

The logical place for the Consortium's headquarters was Ouagadougou, where the FESPACO had been growing in size and importance since its creation in 1969. Here, too, the nationalisation of the film industry in 1977 was concurrent with the creation of a National Film Centre (under the direction of film-maker Gaston Kaboré) which

sought to promote the country's own cinema and build theatres with the aid of box-office receipts from foreign films. The organisation had its work cut out for it.

Like most African countries, Burkina Faso's colonial legacy consisted of the hand-me-downs of religious missions and French business enterprises. Its 'cinema' was a smattering of shorts about hygiene and agriculture, most of them signed by Frenchmen. The country's first indigenous fiction film didn't appear until 1972—Mamadou Djim Kolas' short *The Blood of Pariahs*. But the fortunes of the Burkina first took off in 1983—the year of the national revolution—when Kabore's own *Wend Kuuni (The Gift of God)* and Paul Zoumbara's *Days of Torment* both won international prizes. Thanks to the FESPACO and those national efforts, Burkinabé films today set the agenda for the Francophone African cinema—if not for African cinema *tout court*. That, at least, was the judgment of many at Ouagadougou this year.

Though stylistically varied, African films of the 1960s and 70s were marked by recurring oppositions and themes. They played on the antagonism between tribal and 'western' ways, between city and country. The struggle against colonialism, the difficulties and disenchantment of post-independence life, the rural exodus, the condition of women were common themes. Such elements were habitually used in a political or moralistic way. Partly out of necessity, partly from a refusal to adopt the cosmetic properties of the cinema of its colonisers, the best practitioners of African cinema were often obliged to forsake formal and technical considerations. Films were usually shot in 16mm, for example, or were the wrong length for theatrical release.

If one is to judge by the films at this year's FESPACO, it seems that these traditional oppositions and themes are

handled with fewer political or moral complexities than would have been the case ten years ago. And the best of them likewise conformed exactly to the quantitative demands of the western film industry: 35mm in gauge, 90 minutes in length. Characteristic figures such as the witchdoctor—which formerly represented both the valorised tradition and the irrational past of Africa—have shed their ambiguity to serve more as exotic ornaments or, at their worst, as fey props to advance the plot. In a word, the African cinema has taken on a commercial guise.

'Why have complexes about it?' asked Guinea-Bissau film-maker Flore Gomes, first-time director of *Mortu Nega*. 'Nearly all my technicians were French. I used a French lab to develop the film. We can't be dreamers if we want to make good movies.' Gomes trained as a cameraman in Cuba before serving as an apprentice to Chris Marker in Paris. His cinematographic and political credentials as well as the subject of his film (the Guinea-Bissau struggle for independence) are 'revolutionary'. Yet *Mortu Nega* is most memorable for two reasons: the director's ability to tell a love story against the backdrop of war without resorting to cliché; the presence of a superbly staged helicopter crash. At FF 6 million, *Mortu Nega* isn't only the most expensive film ever to come out of Guinea-Bissau; it's the only film to have come out of the former Portuguese colony. 'I know it cost a great deal,' the director commented, 'especially for a small, poor country like ours. But it's worth every penny if international audiences know and think about Guinea-Bissau.'

A similar endeavour from another largely disregarded country, Madagascar, was *Tabataba (The Rumour)* by Raymond Rajaonarivelo. The film, which also takes a colonial uprising as its point of departure, is equally striking in its technical and dramatic

Yeelen.



achievement. It is also equally predictable, and ultimately a very western tale of betrayal and death. That such films were made at all is a remarkable achievement. To call them 'western tales' is less of a reproach than a comment on the form the cinema of such underdeveloped countries has to resort to, when their national culture takes a quantum leap from artisan production to the complication, expense and technical requirements of motion picture production.

The presence of French technicians and facilities was a common element in most of the best FESPACO entries. Often, they were even co-productions with French or Belgian partners. Like *Mortu Nega*, these films are the work of a second generation of African film-makers, for whom the existence of an African cinema is self-evident. For them, the development of an independent self-image is perhaps less a sought-after goal than a simple consequence of their work.

Films such as Souleymane Cissé's *Yelen* (prize-winner at the 1987 Cannes festival) or Sembène's *Camp de Thiaroye* (a Venice prize-winner last year) represent the persistence of the values of the first generation of African film-makers. Both, however, were shown out of competition at Ouagadougou. A large part of the official entries were the work of this second generation.

One such is a film from Zaire, *La Vie est Belle*. The film is good—very good, even—and made in the best of faith. Yet it is emblematic of the work of this new crop of African film-makers: one has the feeling that the Zairian director Ngangura Mweze and his (significantly) Belgian co-director Benoit Lamy sought to make a film that corresponded exactly to western viewers' expectations of African cinema. The picture is a star vehicle (at least in Zairian terms) and a

calculated crowd-pleaser. And please it does, making it a commercial film in the best sense of the word. *La Vie est Belle* manages to play on a number of the classic themes of the first-generation cinema; yet it does so in a way that would have been unthinkable in Africa only a few years ago.

The film, a musical, stars Zairian pop superstar Papa Wemba as a simple, upright young man from the bush who comes to the capital Kinshasa to make his fortune. There he takes a menial job in a rich man's house and meets a beautiful girl. Unfortunately, she is betrothed to his new employer—who drives round the city in his Mercedes when he is not busy practising a dance

'Wall-to-wall pop music in up-beat comedies is becoming increasingly frequent in the sub-Saharan cinema'

step prescribed by a witchdoctor as a cure for impotence. All this is punctuated and annotated by toe-tapping musical interludes sung by Papa Wemba. Mweze and Lamy manage to draw on the oppositions of city vs country and traditional vs western values, along with class differences in post-independence society and the condition of women. The theme of male impotence among the African bourgeoisie was, of course, the subject of Sembène's classic comedy *Xala* (1974). But the protagonist's physical condition was then a political comment on the powerlessness of a parasitic ruling class; here it is merely an occasion for comic recourse to traditional medicine.

The wall-to-wall use of pop music in up-beat comedies is becoming in-

creasingly frequent in the sub-Saharan cinema. And why not? The region boasts some of the world's best and most distinctive popular music and musicians. Claude Cadiou's French-Ivory Coast co-production *La Vie Platinée* took the lead in this direction three years ago, showcasing guitarist Zanzibar and his group Les Têtes Brûlées. Since the success of that film, however, Cameroonian film-maker Jean-Marie Teno failed in his effort to repeat the phenomenon with *Bikutsi Water Blues*.

Other young black film-makers assembled similarly infelicitous patchworks, the most baldly commercial among them being *Les Guérisseurs (The Healers)* from the Ivory Coast director Sirjiri Bakaba. The film-maker uses a young black executive's traumatic return from Europe as a pretext for a story of pimps, whores, easy money and fast cars in a fictitious African country. Actors and technicians alike are French. Indeed, the film owes its greatest debt to the latter-day action pictures of Jean-Paul Belmondo. Another such film—same themes, but drawing on German rather than French technical support—was the Senegalese *Saaraha*.

And Burkina film-makers? 'The presence of the FESPACO here has given us a great advantage in terms of what we can say and do,' Gaston Kaboré told me. On the basis of his festival entry, *Zam Boko*, it would be difficult to dispute his claim. The film, about urbanisation and censorship, is poetic, humorous and critical at once. *Zam Boko* (the name means 'place where the placenta is buried'—ancestral homeland) is the story of the peasant Tinga, who is forced from his ancestral home by a government urban development programme. His new neighbour, a high-level bureaucrat, wants to buy his property and turn it into a swimming pool and patio, and pulls strings to have Tinga evicted. His misadventures, however, are followed by an investigative journalist, who shocks the Burkina government by bringing Tinga on his live television talk show together with the very government officials who engineered his eviction.

'I don't find it a particularly courageous film,' Kaboré said dismissively. 'Burkina Faso has a censorship commission, but they gave me the green light. There's an element of fiction in the setting; nothing I say in *Zam Boko* affects the current regime. I actually began the film in 1978, at a time when we didn't even anticipate the 1983 revolution, let alone the coup d'état of 1987.'

If Kaboré has maintained the art of African political film-making by refining it, his countryman Idrissa Ouedraogo has done the same for the tradition of moralism in African cinema. His *Yaaba (The Grandmother)* was almost unanimously recognised as the single most impressive achievement at the festival. It's the story of an old woman pariah befriended by a young

Papa Wemba in *La Vie est Belle*.



boy, and its strength is in the performances, the richness of detail and the unity of the director's vision. One can't even reproach Ouedraogo for having idealised or sentimentalised village life. In the film-maker's speech as in his work there is nothing polemical or even contentious. 'It's just the story of life in a village. In the villages you discover man as he is—good, evil, generous, intolerant. The spirit of Burkina is in the village.'

Like Kaboré, Ouedraogo has shown promise in the past, notably with his first feature *Yam Daabo* (*The Choice*) at the 1987 Cannes festival. With *Zam Boko* and *Yaaba*, these two Burkinabè film-makers have perhaps created a sort of New African Cinema, critical in content, realist in style and free of complexes. They have done so with the aid of French technicians and money, yet neither regards assistance from the former colonial master as a high price to pay. For them, it is simply a source of support that permits them to work—like the presence of the international film festival here, which has fostered an appreciation of the cinema and a tolerance for free expression.

Although the FESPACO had existed since 1969, it took on new vitality after the 1983 revolution, which brought the popular and charismatic military leader Thomas Sankara to power. Sankara loved the cinema in general and FESPACO in particular—in part because they served as instruments for promoting the Burkina revolution and his own career. For him, the FESPACO was an opportunity to bask in the attention of the world press. He often arrived dressed in jogging gear to lead the guests in calisthenics. His press conferences were said to be so rehearsed and engineered that they resembled nothing so much as a motion picture production. In October 1987, however, Sankara was arrested (and, allegedly, murdered) by his adviser, Blaise Campaoré, Burkina Faso's current military president. As a result, some Africans as well as Europeans boycotted this year's festival.

Like Sankara, Campaoré is handsome and vital (if a bit shy)—one of the baby-faced members of the country's young ruling class. Unlike Sankara, he is not a dyed-in-the-wool cinephile. If I dwell on Burkina Faso's political leadership, it is because here one is able to observe at close range the dynamic between political power and film culture. At Cannes, it is difficult to get an interview with the president of the jury; at FESPACO, visiting critics dine with the president of the country.

Campaoré's home is a modest one for the head of state, government and the country's only political party. The living room is decorated with a hanging pot of plastic flowers, an empty aquarium, allegorical revolutionary paintings and two formal heroic portraits of Campaoré himself. The spread laid out by his cook and servants is by no means lavish.

Campaoré prefers to keep a lower profile at the festival than his pre-

decessor: 'The movies should speak for themselves.' Is the heavy reliance on European finance and expertise for Burkinabè films a liability? 'I don't think so,' he answers after a moment's reflection. He wasn't particularly bothered by the critical tone of *Zam Boko*. He cautiously avoids the subject of his view on the course that Burkina Faso's development should take or of his own ideological persuasion. 'The hardest part of my job is not negotiating credits from Paris, but creating a new kind of man,' he says with a smile. 'My ideology is to feed and house the people and keep them healthy.' Should the cinema play a role in the creation of this new kind of man? 'Sure.'

'The hardest part of my job is not negotiating credits from Paris, but creating a new kind of man'

After a few more questions, the president begins to grow restless. He asks his servants to bring in his pet lion cubs. He and the visiting journalists quickly lose track of subjects like ideology and development. I subsequently found that Campaoré's bathroom was decorated with a poster of a chimpanzee sitting on the toilet reading the *Sunday Times*.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, a classic book about the colonial experience, Frantz Fanon describes the three phases of intellectual 'decolonisation'. The African intellectual attempts without success to adopt as his own the culture of the former colonial power. He then moves in the opposite direction, striving in vain to return to traditional cultural sources like folklore and tribal

ritual. Finally, he loses his self-destructive fixation with identity and seeks instead to develop the complex, mixed popular culture that is his heritage. Fanon's description of 'colonial culture without complexes' corresponds precisely to the cinema of Burkina Faso.

This destitute country's principal export is human labour. As much as 90 per cent of the women are illiterate. The enforced 'permanent revolution' of Blaise Campaoré's regime takes the form chiefly of banners with such mottoes as 'Shame on Imperialism'. Yet none of this prevents the country's filmmakers from creating the kind of richly detailed, personal visions that should be the envy of their former colonial rulers, the French (who for their part have lost their touch for this sort of *cinéma d'auteur* which they created). Burkinabè cinéastes refuse to let themselves be reproached for their reliance on foreign technicians, or for their lack of revolutionary fervour.

Poolside at the Hotel Independence—the centre of the FESPACO—is much like poolside at any hotel in Cannes or Venice. The only difference is that here few of the guests choose to swim because of the imagined danger of contracting polio or tetanus. On the baking terrace of the Independence I met a festival director from Switzerland who described a whirlwind tour that took him to Delhi, Teheran, Berlin and Monte Carlo. Moments later, I was poked in the eye by an elderly, unidentified German lady with whom I had once shared a cab in Moscow years ago without exchanging so much as a word. If anyone in Ouagadougou should have complexes, it most decidedly is not the local film-makers.

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Tabataba.



DOUBLE TAKES

THE MOGG THAT DIDN'T BARK

As the old television order gives way to the new, the Government which so enthusiastically welcomed the changes is finding itself, once more, presiding over a muddle. At one stage its policy was clear, if hardly consistent. It wanted deregulation and the replacement of an interfering IBA with a 'light touch' ITC. It also urged a reaffirmation, if not quite of Victorian values, at least of good old-fashioned standards, and established the Broadcasting Standards Council under Lord Rees-Mogg to put that part of the house in order.

Broadcasters (and others) shuddered as Rees-Mogg's council was put together, with Home Secretary Douglas Hurd's 'general balance' of public representation taking fleshly form as a committee of eight, two of them clerics, with an average age around 60. When Rees-Mogg immediately started talking of 'an excess of sex and violence on British television' and of his disapproval of *The A-Team*, and when the committee suggested that it would seek to preview imported material, the worst fears seemed justified.

It was surprise and relief, therefore, which greeted the appointment of Colin Shaw, previously Chief Secretary of the BBC and Director of Television at the IBA, as Director of the Council. And when the rapidly produced draft Code of Practice appeared in February, it was not the dogmatic and rule-bound document that had been foreseen, but no more than a curiously old-fashioned version of the broadcasters' own codes—which Shaw had earlier had a hand in formulating.

It is of course possible to find cause for concern with the Code. It does, by its very reticence and refusal to lay down the law, give room for interpretation that might prove restrictive—notably in the areas of news and documentary. It pays too little attention to the fact that Britain is now a multi-cultural society within which there are very different attitudes to many issues. There are occasional nonsenses like the disapproval of 'homely' nicknames for notorious criminals (is it to be Alphonse Capone, Ben Siegel, and 'the unknown Whitechapel killer of 1888'?).

Yet, overall, the Code is libertarian in spirit, and full of point and counterpoint. Thus, 'Violence is a legitimate ingredient of drama. It should, however, seldom be an end in itself for the purpose of entertainment, although in the right hands it can sometimes be so. The context of violence is what matters ...'. On the protection of children, the Council 'believes that parents have a real responsibility for deciding what their children see or hear ...'. However, the Council recognises that there is a long-standing dilemma posed for producers by the absence of effective supervision

from many homes with children, a dilemma made more complex by the legitimate interests of the far greater number of households, about double in fact, with no children at all.'

This is not, then, a document that sets out a framework for 'doing something about the media', as the Government presumably intended. Will it fulfil the second implicit function in its brief and provide a code that can be consistently applied across all the broadcast media and thereby an umbrella to protect us from pollution from the sky? Ironically, the answer here again is in the negative. The Council has concluded that no single standard can be laid down. Of course there is the time element: more can be shown later than earlier in the day, and the Council reaffirms the importance of the 9 p.m. 'watershed', though thereby ignoring the fact that both cable and satellite have settled for a different system with 8 and 10 p.m. as the significant points. But, in addition, the Council has accepted that standards must reflect 'the degree of accessibility and the nature of the service itself.' The Code suggests that the strong language and more explicit violence of American films 'is better suited to subscription services', which have to be specially purchased and probably unscrambled.

We take great exception to this. What determines a viewer's choice should not be the money in his pocket,' objected Michael Grade, managing to ignore the fact that that is just how choice is now largely to be determined. His Channel 4 colleague Liz Forgan has also inveighed against what she sees as 'commercial opportunism'. It is an argument waged by those who would like to sell subscriptions to movie chan-

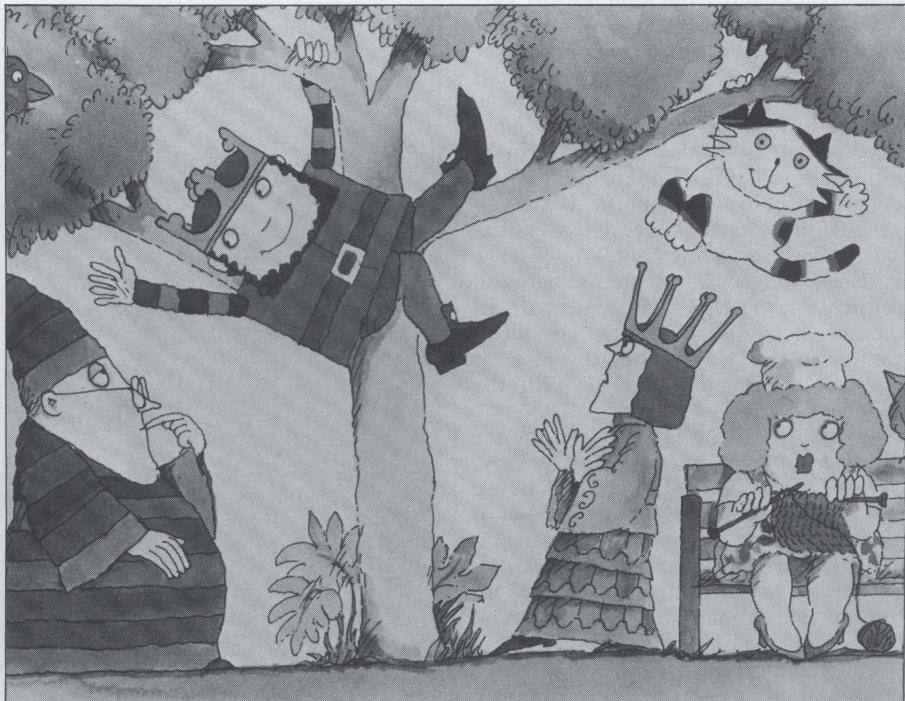
nels on the basis that these are the only places to see uncut movies. Now I had always thought this very argument was used by Channel 4 to encourage viewers to watch films not subjected to the often bizarre cuts and dubbing perpetrated by other channels. In other words, Channel 4 (and BBC2) already operate a different 'code' from that of BBC1 and ITV, while video and the cinema are allowed greater latitude than broadcast television. The BSC is merely following logic and current practice in suggesting that subscription services fit somewhere in between.

At this stage the Code is merely a draft and it remains to be seen how it will change on its way to becoming the guiding document of a statutory body. Rees-Mogg and his Council have been out on the road, if not to Damascus, at least to nine British cities where they have talked to a selected cross-section of television viewers. 'The British public is tolerant, liberal and non-puritanical,' Rees-Mogg discovered. Viewers are concerned about the media's influence on children, and they dislike bad language, but their attitudes to sex proved to be robust and they did not want to be overprotected from violence. 'The Press,' announced the ex-editor of *The Times*, 'has underrated the quality of the judgment of the public.'

So the Council, established, in the words of deputy director David Horton, 'as a response to what [the Government] perceived to be public concern about the portrayal of sex and violence and matters of taste and decency,' has now concluded that this public concern is largely chimerical.

It is certainly interesting to hear Lord Rees-Mogg arguing that 'we want influence, not teeth' at the very time

Children's television: King Rollo.



DOUBLE TAKES

when the Press Council under Louis Blom Cooper is desperately trying to add some bite to its easily ignored bark. For the moment it does not look as though the Council will be doing much more than imposing current standards on the new media. How it will operate post-1992 in relation to fellow Europeans with very different ideas on taste, pornography, child development and other issues is much less predictable.

CHILDREN'S TELEVISION

What meanwhile of the 'light-touch' Independent Television Commission, due to succeed the IBA? Here again government plans seem to be going awry. As an example, it is worth considering children's television, the future of which was discussed at a conference at the NFT in March. This marked the inauguration of a new pressure group, BAC TV, designed to 'protect and encourage quality and diversity in children's television.'

The agenda had been set by the experience of deregulated American TV. Encouraged by Ronald Reagan, the Federal Communications Commission had abandoned 'minority' programming to the pressures of market forces. A policy, less 'light touch' than 'look, no hands', resulted in an almost instant collapse of children's programming: the US networks now provide five hours a week between them.

How were we to avoid this catastrophe? The Government, which was willing deregulation on a nation hardly crying out for it, provided two speakers. Junior Education Minister Angela Rumbold ('a very busy lady') swept in and out, in the brief interim displaying a formidably tenuous hold on the nature

of the event. She seemed to imagine that BAC TV was to be a forum at which parents and teachers would band together to knock sense into those silly broadcasters. In fact a large proportion of the conference delegates were media professionals.

John Greenway MP did stay rather longer. A member of the Home Affairs Select Committee, he had reassuring things to say. In the first place he was optimistic that there would be an education/children's channel (politicians apparently see no difference) on satellite. He admitted that the one originally planned for BSB had already plunged to earth, but argued that these were early days... Next he warmed us with his Select Committee's suggestion that schools programmes could be broadcast at night and downloaded to video—though here again there was a flaw, in that the White Paper envisaged taking the night hours away from the public-service broadcasters. Still, as Greenway emphasised, the White Paper has 'green edges', and anyway, 'British TV is the best in the world because we have the talent.' Why worry about structures and funding, it was implied, when our innate ability to make great TV programmes is bound to see us through?

Just in case any of us inveterate doubters had further cause for concern, Greenway had one more trump card. There never had been any rules requiring the supply of children's programming by the ITV companies—so why should there be any such stipulation now? It was when Lady Plowden rose magisterially to assert that, rules or no rules, the IBA had always compelled ITV companies to include children's programming in their schedules, a compulsion that she felt would not be enforced

by the new 'light touch', that the plot thickened. Greenway responded that the new body would have the same powers as the old. 'It is not up to the Government to ensure the existence of children's programmes—it is up to the regulators. The ITC will be a regulatory body.' This certainly cast a new light on deregulation—or, rather, left us even deeper in the dark. The trouble is, as someone remarked later: 'Every time we hear from a Government spokesman about the ITC, it sounds different.'

Assuming, for the moment at least, that market forces are pre-eminent and that, as ITC Chairman-designate George Russell has already confirmed, minority programmes must pay their way, the question arose as to whether this was possible. David Elstein, director of programmes at Thames, was suitably blunt. In his estimation, children's programmes were already vastly overfunded in relation to income. They consume 20 per cent of original programme costs and bring in only 4 per cent of advertising revenue, he stated. Through oversight, no doubt, he somehow omitted foreign sales and other sources of income from this equation, but even including these he would presumably stand by his conclusion that, 'Come 1992, given a "light-touch" regulator and without such programming enshrined in the schedules, I don't see children's programming surviving at all.'

Satellite and cable he dismissed for reaching only a proportion of the audience and being most unlikely to generate their own material. The much vaunted Disney Channel was aimed at families rather than children, he pointed out, and entertains some odd notions. 'We spent a year persuading them to come in with us to make Roald Dahl's *Danny the Champion of the World*. They kept saying: "Hey, this story is about poaching!"'

Since the conference, suggestions that the ITC's light touch was being replaced with a heavier hand were fuelled by the comments on the White Paper offered by George Russell. His position was made plain by an apparent threat to resign if the proposal to auction franchises to the highest bidder was implemented. He proposed a compromise that would allow quality of programming intentions also to be considered. The speed with which nimble Home Office Minister Tim Renton accepted the drift of Russell's thoughts betrayed the extent to which the Government's position had been eroded.

Far from being a mere 'licensing agency' shorn of its powers of discretion, its control over scheduling and its ability to preview, the ITC was now looking like a tougher animal. As the Government saw its watchdog, the BSC, retiring voluntarily into its kennel, it has seemingly been forced to accept a much more positive role for the ITC.

Children's television: Central's Press Gang.



DOUBLE TAKES



Gorillas in the Mist: Sigourney Weaver.

HIT AND MISS

A recent newspaper article waxed lyrical about Hollywood's 'latest money-spinner', *Gorillas in the Mist*. True, this was a high-profile picture, generating lots of TV and colour supplement coverage. It was, however, a considerable commercial failure. Having cost \$22 million to make (a figure that excludes any print or publicity costs), it took only \$12 million in the United States, a gap that will not have been covered by foreign earnings or ancillary sales (video, TV, etc).

Without scrutinising the figures, it is often hard to know which films did actually pay their way. Which of the following, for instance, would you imagine finished up in the red for their various investors: *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, *Nine½ Weeks*, *The Mosquito Coast*, *Superman IV*, *A Cry in the Dark*, *Red Heat*, *High Spirits*, *Angel Heart*? A generally successful list, you might estimate: but in fact every single one made a loss, in some cases a very large loss. Again, what about the following: *The Dead Pool*, *Jumpin' Jack Flash*, *The Karate Kid Part II*, *Harry and the Hendersons*, *Wildcats*? They all earned back their hefty production costs in America alone, so will have gone well into the black overall.

If one or two of these titles are relatively unfamiliar, it reflects the fact that Britain and the US are different markets. *Cry Freedom* was cruelly ignored in America, but did well enough here—as did the thoroughly American *Innerspace*, another disappointment on its home territory. By contrast, many films little known here have caught the imagination elsewhere. Films like *Mr Mom*, *Billy Jack*, *Purple Rain* and *Dragnet* all took over \$30 million in the States, putting them only just outside the Top 100 of all time. And what about the John Hughes comedy *The Great Outdoors*, starring Dan Aykroyd? It

took over \$20 million in US cinemas. Here the box office take was precisely nothing, the film being released straight on to video.

Then there are those films that do well everywhere, but cost so much to make that it is almost impossible to show a profit. Spielberg's *Empire of the Sun*, for example, consumed \$38 million in the making and recovered less than a third of this in America. It did better in other territories, but still left its backers out of pocket. *Rambo III* took nearly \$30 million in US cinemas. Unfortunately it cost twice that to produce. Even its huge success in Japan and elsewhere will have left Big John scrambling to balance the books.

Of course it is not always clear who actually loses money on a film that sinks—like Polanski's doomed *Pirates* (cost \$31 million, US rentals \$1 million). Pre-sales and other arrangements can ensure that the financiers are in profit before a seat is sold. But someone suffers—be it sales agents, distributors, exhibitors or whoever has been rash enough to buy into what seemed an attractive deal before the film was made. The much-publicised *Heaven's Gate* fiasco proved to be only a short-term disincentive. Big-budget pictures are now seen as a safer bet than smaller ones. As Terry Gilliam's *Baron Munchausen* rides hopefully out of the gate with a burdensome \$50 million on his shoulders, money is doubtless being laid on equally unlikely ventures. The runaway success of Roger, that big-buck rabbit (cost \$50 million, US rentals \$80 million) will have spurred others to enter the frame.

SNEAKS

Though seen at the last London Film Festival, Beeban Kidron's *Vroom* is not, after all, to have a London run—for rather unusual reasons. A sort of Northern road movie filmed in Lancashire, the picture was premiered in Nelson, where it was hoped that the local interest would guarantee encouraging attendances. It didn't. Being made in the region evidently failed to outweigh the fact that *Vroom* has no stars, no obvious 'hook' and no publicity budget to speak of. Sadly, like rather too many recent Channel 4 productions, it seems that *Vroom* just isn't the stuff of big screen success.

Whether it was intended that way or not, the Nelson showings have been used as a sort of test screening, at which audiences have failed to vote with their feet. How fair it is to judge a film's potential on this sort of basis is one of the unresolved mysteries of the film industry. Some film-makers (David Putnam among them) believe in sneak previews and use them to fine-tune their productions before release. John Schlesinger is one director who takes this view and happily (and sometimes

endlessly) adjusts his films according to audience perceptions. Whether such tinkering is always for the better is a matter of opinion. Writer William Goldman commented bitterly that *Marathon Man*, 'was a picture that, I suspect, was grievously damaged by the sneak reaction.'

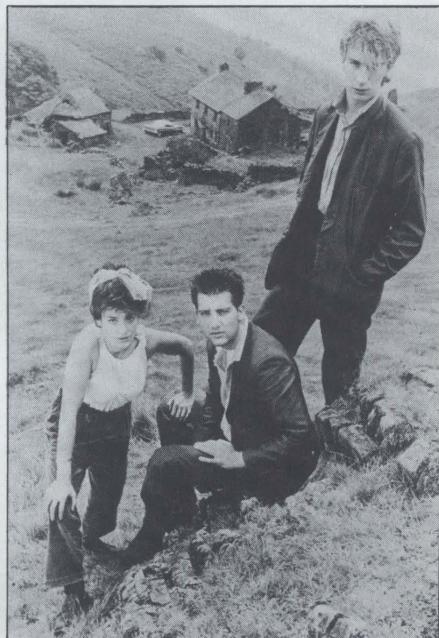
Some directors are more cynical, suspecting that the whole exercise is just a way for executives to interfere with their vision. The crux of the problem is just how audience reactions are to be interpreted. In his book *The Studio*, John Gregory Dunne told of the anxiety felt by the Fox officials as they approached the task of analysing the cards filled in by audiences for *Dr Dolittle*, and the incomprehension when 'only' 57 per cent rated the film 'excellent'. They all just knew that the audience had been more enthusiastic than that.

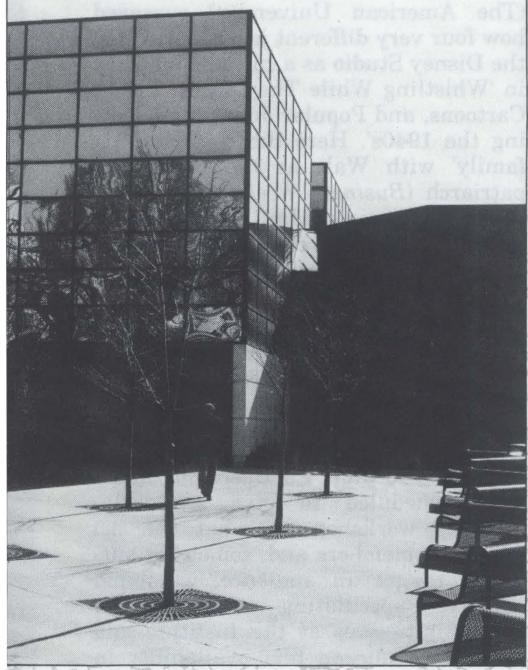
More recently, Rob Reiner has recalled how his film *The Sure Thing* got a preview reaction so good that only *ET* and *Gable and Lombard* had done better—begging the question: was his film going to be another *ET* or another *Gable and Lombard*. Unfortunately for Reiner, it was the latter.

Another film to be well received at previews was Sam Peckinpah's *Ride the High Country*. But, as one executive explained later, 'Though the cards were sensational ... we didn't believe them. The movie didn't cost enough to be that good.' It opened some time later on the lower half of a double bill. A similar fate nearly befell Billy Wilder's *The Lost Weekend*, which was greeted with laughter and derision at its preview with the cards dismissing it as a 'disgusting movie'. Shelved for a while, it eventually won four Oscars. Perhaps there is hope for *Vroom* yet.

FERDINAND

Vroom: Diana Quick, Clive Owen, David Thewlis.





IAN CHRISTIE reports
on a formidable clan
gathering, the 1989
Society for Cinema
Studies Conference at
the University of Iowa

From occasional sneers in the mainstream press, it's clear that many still believe the film academy to be dominated by structuralists and semiologists, or by fundamentalist Althusserians and Lacanians. In truth, such long-evacuated positions are as embarrassing to most of their former proponents as the bell-bottoms and kipperties that once accompanied them. But their traces remain—alongside textual archaeology, corporate and institutional history, cognitive research and other new currents—in the hybridised discourse of contemporary media studies. Gone now, however, is the polemical purism that once terrorised, as cinema and television studies have become an altogether more pragmatic business—especially in North America, where they are indeed a thriving business, at least in the university sector.

But does this abandonment of the high ground signal a loss of purpose, maturity at the price of trivial diversification, or even the growth of old-fashioned careerism in a once-maverick enterprise? These questions began to crystallise at Minneapolis Airport one afternoon in April as I scanned the formidable Annual Conference programme of the Society for Cinema Studies—as well as my fellow passen-

LIVES of the FILM SCHOLARS

gers en route to Cedar Rapids-Iowa City. Could they all be going to the conference; and did they perhaps include the contributors of such papers as 'The Three Stooges (anti-)Narrative of Violence: De(con)structive Comedy', 'Ideological Crisis: *RoboCop*, Video and the Reconstruction of Subjectivity', 'Planet Earth to Sitcom' or my own favourite "Surge and Splendor": A Phenomenology of the Historical Epic?

These in fact were among the many papers I didn't hear from a total of around two hundred given in three hectic days under the hospitable aegis of Dudley Andrew's Institute for Cinema and Culture at the University of Iowa. 'Exemplary Midwestern experiences' like pig roasts had been contemplated, we were told, but rejected in favour of 'the collective enterprise of education'—our noses to the grindstone, we were kept whirring in fifty-odd panels which offered round-the-clock choice on a Cannes Festival scale.

Speeding along windswept highways toward Iowa City, rather like entering a James Benning structural landscape movie, punctuated only by watertowers, one wonders why film scholarship and the American Midwest seem to fit together so well. Lack of other distractions, the visiting cynic might say, but it's clear that between them Iowa, Madison and Chicago's Northwestern University have done more than their fair share to populate the landscape of American cinema studies with graduates and future gurus.

Of course, those other bastions of cinema scholarship, New York University and the University of California at Los Angeles, would probably challenge this distant perception (perhaps they did in the 'Disappearing Signifier' panel, with such papers as 'In the Laboratory of Exploding Signifiers: Students' Stake in the Expansion of Film

Studies' and 'Cinema Studies and "the wave of the future"'); but even if there sometimes seemed more political and cosmopolitan edge to NYU and UCLA scholarship, this was amid an abundance of challenging contributions from all sides. What follows, however, is no aerial guide to the terrain, only one curious visitor's itinerary.

Useful advice for the 370 conferees from the programme booklet's tongue-in-cheek McLuhan quotation: 'When faced with information overload, the only alternative is pattern recognition.' If any single pattern marked this year's diverse contributions, it seemed to be a dual rejection of 'big theory' and of received history. The panel 'Reconsidering Film Theory' had to be moved to a larger room to accommodate the crush for what was clearly a widely shared priority, and revisionist historical inquiry in various forms dominated the conference. British expatriate Richard Allen (formerly of the University of East Anglia, now NYU) opened the film theory rethink with an elegant overview of the transition from Baudry's psychoanalytic model of film spectatorship, through the metaphor of Lacan's 'mirror stage' which constructs a 'subject' from the viewing process, to Althusser's influential recasting of the screen-subject relation in terms of ideology as systematic misrecognition.

Elegant, but already perhaps a part of history, not least because of its ahistoricism. Fellow panellists Nick Browne (UCLA) and Thomas Elsaesser (UEA) gave better clues to the new directions. Browne tackled the formative period of film theory in the 20s when the theatrical model and notions of 'pictorialism' and 'efficiency' were in play, but significantly his texts were American, instead of French or Russian. Film theory has taken an historical turn and is

increasingly seen as itself a product of the institution of cinema, instead of something standing outside it. For Elsaesser, who probably encapsulated the mood of the conference better than any other speaker, it was in fact the growing interest in early cinema as much as anything that had prompted a radical critique of contemporary film theory, showing how narrow were its notions of spectatorship.

Was it not time, he wondered, to recognise that Baudry and Metz actually reflected a particular historical attitude to cinema—that of 50s Parisian cinephiles—rather than a timeless analysis of its universal mechanisms? And did not Baudrillard's questioning of the 'reality' supposedly standing behind our whole system of representation echo Nietzsche's realisation that only belief in God had once underpinned the reign of grammar? Film theory, according to Elsaesser, emerged historically from a critique of the realist presumption. Now the preoccupation with spectatorship which this led to was breaking up under the pressure of internal contradiction (which he termed 'the Mulvey paradox'), experiential inadequacy (its over-concentration on the voyeuristic aspect of cinema), and inability to deal with the sheer diversity of cinema 'in the aggregate state'. What was needed was a fundamental rethink from new coordinates—a 'Martian view'.

Word in the corridors was that the new paradigm had indeed emerged as 'cognitivism', advanced by Madison's David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Edward Branigan and others, but characteristically played down as a comprehensive theory. I didn't hear Bordwell's 'Case for Cognitivism' or Branigan's 'Cognitive Science Approach to Narrative and Fiction', but would guess that their interest in the physiology, perceptual psychology and 'learning' of cinema spectatorship will go some way to answering Elsaesser's call. After the unconscious, the preconscious and—good grief!—the conscious.

Also from Wisconsin—a classic instance of Madison revisionism, according to Bordwell—was Vance Kepley's 'Lenin and Soviet Cinema: The Nationalisation Decree Reconsidered', which took a well-aimed pickaxe to that *fons et origo* of all Soviet cinema history, Lenin's nationalisation and alleged belief in the importance of cinema over all other arts. Kepley has already demolished many sacred cows in this field, and here he showed how earlier historians have been in thrall to teleology, preferring to see the 1918 nationalisation as at least the start of a glorious history, instead of the last in a series of stop-gap, largely counterproductive measures. To a fellow revisionist, this was stirring stuff and will undoubtedly bear fruit by directing attention to the real economy of early Russian production—before as well as after the Revolution. And for good measure, Murray Smith, a Madison graduate student working with Kepley, challenged the

conventional assumption in Soviet studies that Socialist Realism eclipsed the 20s avant-garde by tracing the literary genealogy of the rather intermittent hero in Dovzhenko's *Arsenal*, showing how closely related were the exemplary and the experimental at this time.

Just how unsettling the rise of economic and industrial history can be for more aesthetically-inclined critics was discussed, with engaging frankness, by Dudley Andrew in his contribution to the French 'History and Historiography of National Cinema' panel. In 'Films or Franks? How to Measure the Industry's Health', Andrew highlighted the dilemmas faced by any synoptic historian: how to decide the 'important' films, and how to balance the claims of commerce against those of culture? And further to confuse the already complex problem of periodisation in French cinema being debated by Andrew with Alan Williams (Rutgers) and Dick Abel (Drake), Natasia Durovicova introduced a new scrutiny of 'The French Multilinguals', those by-products of the sound revolution, which argues a much greater significance for them than the usual footnote in narrative history.

But the main beneficiary of the new scholarship is undoubtedly American cinema history, which now grapples with a range of issues and sources undreamed of in the innocent days of high auteurism. Bill Simon's 'Orson Welles and Documentary Expression' drew on the research that went into his NYU Cinema Studies Department exhibition about Welles last year, which demonstrated the crucial importance of Welles' radio work, to restore the context of documentary throughout American 30s culture as vital in any understanding of Welles. James Naremore (Indiana) reported the results of his Freedom of Information Act trawl on Welles, which gave fascinating (and often hilarious) insights into the paranoid world of Hoover's FBI as they monitored Welles' extravagant career. Just when the Bureau felt they'd really caught Welles at work on a major 'leftist' political project, *It's All True*, the discovery that he'd actually been encouraged in it by the State Department put an abrupt, shame-faced end to this line of inquiry.

'Industry' research is also devising new methodologies. John Belton (Rutgers), in 'The Discourse(s) of CinemaScope' practised some sophisticated analysis on various documents from Fox and other archives to show the forces that governed attitudes to widescreen processes at different periods. From a 1946 complaint by the technical department that 'Mr Zanuck did not choose to attend the demonstration of Grandeur', a late-20s process which it was trying to revive, Belton moved to a 1953 letter from Zanuck to Jack Warner, urging adoption of Fox's CinemaScope on the grounds that it can make 'an average comedy look like *Quo Vadis*'. But his *pièce de résistance* was a persuasive interpretation of Warner's doodles on the back of the same letter while

taking a follow-up call from Zanuck.

On the same panel, Eric Smoodin (The American University) surveyed how four very different journals covered the Disney Studio as a cultural industry in 'Whistling While They Work: Labor, Cartoons, and Popular Journalism During the 1940s'. Here the rhetoric of 'a family' with Walt as the benevolent patriarch (*Business Week*) and 'a community of artists' (Jay Leyda in *The Saturday Review*) clearly echoed the generally unsympathetic press treatment of labour militancy at the studio, and revealed some of the confusions about authorship, process and creativity that continue to dog discussion of the Disney phenomenon.

By this time panels and papers were beginning to blur. Ed Buscombe and I were scheduled to give an early-morning workshop on what the BFI offers SCS members and, somewhat surprised to get an audience, we found ourselves speculating on future research initiatives at the Institute and the role of uneven film availability in shaping the canon. But still the panels beckoned... More entertaining Madison revisionism on offer in Kristin Thompson's 'Dr Caligari at the Folies-Bergère', which drew on Thompson's unrivalled knowledge of prewar distribution patterns and the European trade press to demonstrate that *Caligari* not only had to beat an import ban to enter France in 1921-22, but when it did, its influence (and popular commercial success) was immense, even inspiring a tableau at the Folies-Bergère. So much for *Caligari* as a mere art movie.

Elsewhere, a fascinating account by Sumiko Higashi (SUNY-Brockport) of 'Cecil B. DeMille, the Lasky Company and the Rise of the Feature Film' showed how elaborate were Lasky's attempts to link cinema with reputable theatre and even the Metropolitan Opera, through the engagement of the diva Geraldine Farrar. Rather than inaugurating a new era of popular or 'low' culture, these pioneers largely succeeded in inserting film into a cultural continuum which still predated the 'highbrow/lowlbrow' split.

Indeed, as Elsaesser claimed, it is the explosion of interest in early cinema—focused by such events as the 1978 Brighton FIAF Congress and the Pordenone Festival—that has sparked the most radical rethinking of cultural, industrial and formal history in recent cinema studies. Behind such modest titles as Ben Brewster's 'Traffic in Souls: A Formal Experiment in Feature-length Narrative Construction' and Steven Higgins' 'The Emergence of the Feature Film at Inceville' (the former about a major Pordenone discovery and the latter Ince's lost *Battle of Gettysburg*), there is a revolution under way, producing a more empirically exact account of how cinematic forms and cinema itself developed which challenges standard assumptions about 'primitivism' and 'progress'.

The great art historian ► p. 194

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BEN MADDOW

the invisible man

The real Ben Maddow is cloaked by several overlapping careers, and two distinct writing pseudonyms. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, his reputation is firm as one of the more intelligent and subtle Hollywood screenwriters of his era, even though Maddow insists that scriptwriting, for him, was never much more than a job. Although he is not quite a '*hombre misterioso*', as a Spanish newspaper described him, it seems characteristic that diligent research has turned up only one photograph of him.

Maddow graduated from Columbia University, New York, in 1930. He had begun writing poetry while at college, and it was as 'David Wolff' that he wrote short stories and left-wing poetry during the 1930s. In 1935 he answered a newspaper advertisement for someone to write the commentary for a short film. The film was *Harbour Scenes*, and it introduced 'Wolff' to Frontier Films, the left-labour documentary group headed by Ralph Steiner, Leo Hurwitz and Paul Strand. 'I invented a way of using narration in films which suited my purposes very well and has influenced other people—which was to construct the narration like poetry, in which every word modifies the image. I worked out a ratio of two words to a second, which worked perfectly. In those days you ran the film as you were

recording the narration, so you had this very close connection between the image and the writing. In that sense, I was not a writer, but a poet and filmmaker.'

'David Wolff' wrote for Frontier Films until *Native Land* (1942). 'The equation of the white church spires of New England with the skyscraper [in *Native Land*], as equivalents of Ameri-

Patrick McGilligan

can aesthetics, is really a Hurwitz idea. But that only works, you see, if you think there is an American aesthetic. Perhaps there is. It's a very difficult question.' By the time Frontier Films' most ambitious production was completed, Maddow was already in the Army—which led him, in due course, to service with the Air Force motion picture unit in Los Angeles.

Here, as writer-producer, he worked on some 200 documentaries. 'Ronnie Reagan was there. I used him as a narrator over and over again. He could read things that couldn't have meant anything to him—a B-29 electrical system, for instance—with the utmost conviction. Just take the script overnight and come back and read it with all the

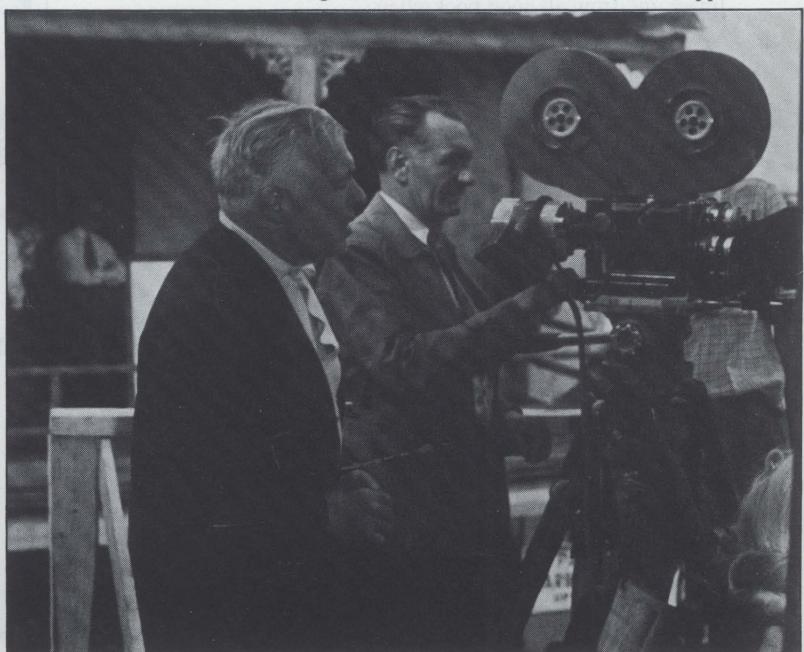
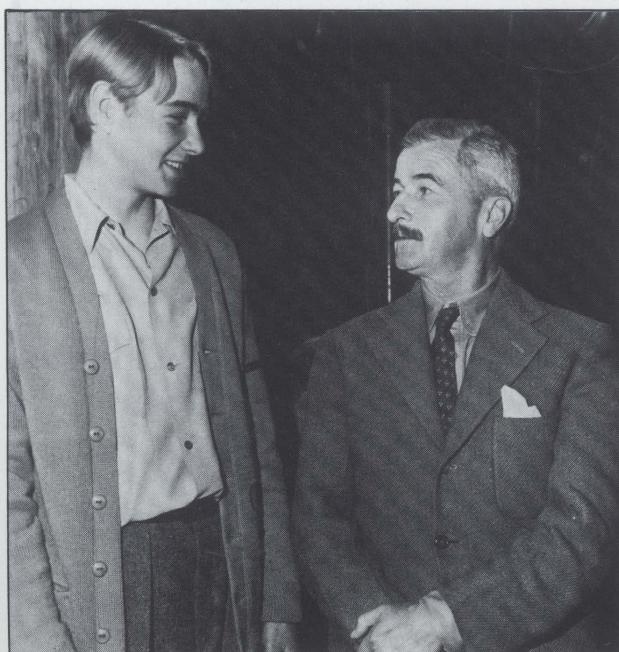
right phrases and emphasis. He didn't understand what he was reading, and he wasn't expected to.'

After the war, Maddow went back to New York and then returned to California and his first Hollywood script: 'a terrible film with a most ridiculous title', *Kiss the Blood Off My Hands* (1948). Then came his two best-known scripts, for *Intruder in the Dust* and *The Asphalt Jungle*, which swiftly established him as among the best of the new, postwar screenwriters. Although he would occasionally turn down assignments because he preferred to work on a poem or a documentary, his career seemed established—until the blacklist descended and he found himself unemployable.

Enter writer-producer Philip Yordan, and a decade of credits, for Maddow and Yordan, which many others—from the *Cahiers du Cinéma* group to the writers of standard reference books—have tried without success to untangle. Maddow has never previously been interviewed on the subject of Yordan, and what he has to say here both clarifies and deepens the mystery of their collaboration during the McCarthyist years. Maddow, for instance, has often been credited with writing *Johnny Guitar*, which some critics regard as a political allegory about the anti-Red hysteria in the United States. Now Maddow says

▼ William Faulkner with Claude Jarman Jr, Chick in *Intruder in the Dust*.

Clarence Brown directing *Intruder in the Dust* in Oxford, Mississippi. ▼



that he doesn't recognise the film at all, while Yordan insists that he rewrote someone else's script alone, on location in Arizona. The other Yordan films (usually involving, in some fashion, ex-Frontier Films editor Irving Lerner and writer-producer Sidney Harmon) helped make ends meet for Maddow, even though his state of mind, as the invisible man, suffered.

There have long been reports that Maddow capitulated to the House Un-American Activities Committee towards the end of the 1950s, but they have not been verified in print. Friends at the time did not want to believe such news: Maddow was regarded as one of the most likeable, honourable people, a stalwart progressive who had also managed to weather the decade with regular, interesting work. When I first spoke to Maddow, it must be admitted that he dodged me on the subject. He said he had not signed any statement or 'named' anybody. It was my first face-to-face encounter with the mystifying forgetfulness of a cooperative witness.

Later that summer, at a film festival in Vermont, I mentioned my interview with Maddow to the octogenarian documentary film-maker Leo Hurwitz, to screenwriter Walter Bernstein (*The Front*; and Maddow's co-writer on *Kiss the Blood Off My Hands*) and to animator Faith Hubley. Hurwitz let me know, in no uncertain terms, that I had been conned: 'He named me!' he said. Walter Bernstein and Faith Hubley filled me in on what was painful common knowledge among the community of blacklist survivors.

At which point, I arranged a second interview with Ben Maddow and once again went over this highly sensitive ground. This time he opened up—somewhat. His statement that there was a pay-off to clear his name has been echoed by others aware of this 'escape route'; evidently this was one subtext of the blacklist—with the money allegedly

going into the coffers of the reactionary unions, the Mob and the Republican Party—though it has never been substantiated in the histories. As if the Yordan confusion were not enough, Maddow also disclosed, in this second conversation, other grey areas among his credits, including early drafts of *High Noon* and *The Wild One* and a stint with Elia Kazan.

In the end, Maddow's 'informing-by-dispensation' (a separate category, created solely for Maddow, in *Naming Names*, Victor Navasky's indispensable chronicle of the blacklist) taints an otherwise admirable career, and adds an unfortunate facet of complexity to someone whose hallmark as a writer was his integrity and his independence.

BEN MADDOW: *Intruder in the Dust* was the beginning of my Hollywood career. Like most things in my life, it came about by accident. A friend's wife happened to be the head of the script department at Metro and she recommended me to the director, Clarence Brown, who had bought this William Faulkner novel and didn't know what the hell to do with it. It was a very poor and complicated novel, written because Faulkner thought a series with a lawyer as a detective would make him a lot of money. There are some things I like about the book, but you can't compare it with *Light in August*. After I did the screenplay, that screenplay became very famous at Metro and was shown around a lot. All my experience in documentaries, trying to put together and straighten things out from a huge mass of chaotic material, paid off there.

Clarence Brown couldn't think his way through the script, because in the novel there are four disinterments, and you cannot have somebody dug out of the grave four times. You had to simplify it to one disinterment at most, and then you had to straighten the plot out. Faulkner's plot is all told backward, which confused Brown.

Brown had a huge office and he would sit at one end and I would sit in a chair facing him—it seemed like half a mile distant, although actually there was much more office behind me as well. He had a parakeet and he would open its cage and this parakeet would fly around while Brown dozed off, which he often did during long script conferences. The parakeet would land on Brown's head and sit there, and he and I would wait patiently until Brown woke up, and then the parakeet would fly around some more.

PAT MCGILLIGAN: Why would Clarence Brown, a director best known for those highly romanticised Garbo pictures, want to make a movie of *Intruder in the Dust*?

—When he was 17 or 18 and going to school in Atlanta, there was a full-blown race riot. Brown had seen blacks pursued in the streets, killed and loaded on flat cars, and driven out of town to be dumped in the woods. He had never forgotten it, and he told me he wanted to make amends for this part of his own history. And somebody had recommended this book to him, which was about an unjustly accused black, although as you know the chief character [in the movie] is not played by a black person but by a Puerto Rican [Juano Hernandez].

I was walking with Clarence Brown at Metro once when we passed Louis B. Mayer. We stopped and they shook hands and Mayer said, 'By the way, Clarence, why do you want to make this picture about the South?' Brown said, 'I just think it's a good story and I'd like to make it.' And Mayer replied, 'All right, Clarence, anything you want.' Because Brown had directed not only the Garbo pictures, but *National Velvet* [1944] and many others.

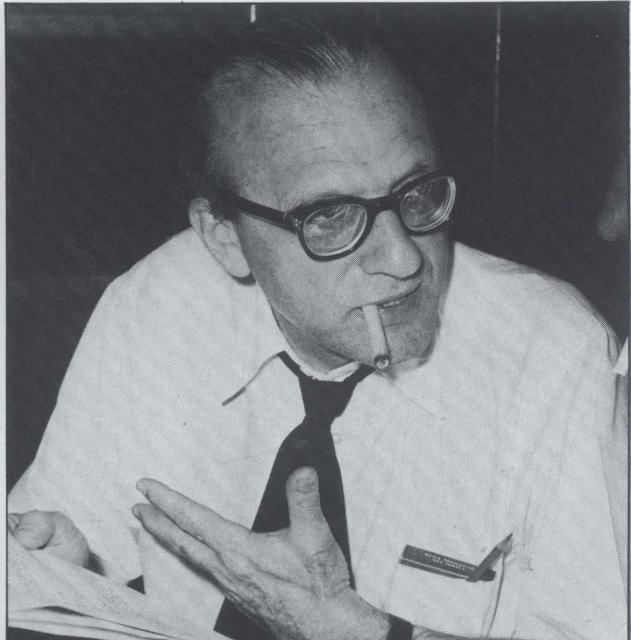
—How did you feel about the finished product?

—I thought it was very, very good. Most times when a writer does a script that he himself likes, when he sees the film

▼ John Huston filming *The Asphalt Jungle*.



▼ Philip Yordan.



there is nothing but terrible shock and dismay. Because the screenplay is a daydream in which you put down certain key points. In between you only imagine what happens. It's implicit in your head. Okay. Now, somebody else takes the script and directs it and you see the same words, but the in-between is not what you imagined at all. The movements, the bodies, the locations, even the faces, the make-up, everything—they're not what you imagined.

But in this case they were, because Faulkner is so precise in detail. That is one of his tremendous merits. No matter how foolish some of his ideas are, he sticks to the truth of the location itself. The very movements are described, how people walk, and so on. That is really a great thrill to see on the screen.

—Did Faulkner say anything to you about the film?

—I never met him. He was in Oxford, Mississippi. The writers were not at that time ever paid to go to the location. You finished your job and that was it.

Val Lewton [the producer] was one of those who admired *Intruder in the Dust* and went around Metro talking about it. We met later on and he told me stories about Faulkner, who lived next door to him in Palos Verdes. Every Sunday morning Faulkner would come over and visit him. Lewton would serve him whisky and ice. There was a parapet which Faulkner would step over carrying a shotgun. He'd put it on the table along with the whisky and he'd break the shotgun apart in pieces, carefully wipe and oil it. This would take him about two hours, until it was finally together to his satisfaction. Then he'd say, 'Goodbye,' which was the second word he would say. Then he'd go back over the parapet.

P.McG.: After *Intruder in the Dust*, you wrote in quick succession two rather interesting genre films, *Framed* (1947) and *The Man from Colorado* (1948).

B.M.: Both those films were produced

by Jules Schermer. That was practice. They were both melodramas, after all. I have been described as 'Ben Maddow, screenwriter of mystery and adventure films', but that is just accident. I think *Framed* was a pretty good melodrama—I remember I felt thrilled that I had invented the opening, in which there was danger from the very first, because there is a truck which is out of control with no brakes. But I never thought those films were a vehicle for any kind of ideas. They paid well, far more than I had ever earned in my life. I couldn't believe it!

—Critics have written that you have always managed to imbue your scripts with social ideas. For instance, though the storyline of *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950) remained the same on the screen, the point of view of the script became more progressive.

—I don't think that was done intentionally. I think it all came out of the novel, though [author] W. R. Burnett did not realise it. Burnett intended *Asphalt Jungle* as a novel about the extraordinary difficulties that the police have in an urban world which has become a jungle. As a matter of fact, the narrator in his book is the police superintendent, is he not?

The film takes the opposite point of view. That crime is simply normal endeavour, another form of business; therefore the concentration on the characters of the criminals makes you like them all and sympathise with them. Certainly you don't sympathise with the police at any point. In any case, I think many authors do not know what it is they are saying, and Burnett made those criminal characters so fascinating that as you read the novel you really didn't feel the police were the heroes.

—Why would Huston want to invert the original emphasis if he liked the novel so much?

—I don't think any conscious decision was ever made or that Huston thought in those abstract terms. Don't forget

that a lot of the movie's power was due to the fact that these were New York actors who all knew one another and were trying to outdo one another. There was nobody who had a name of any consequence. Most of Huston's talent came in the choice of casting, which most directors will tell you anyway, in moments of frankness. It could have been quite a banal film if badly cast.

—How did you become involved with Huston?

—He accepted me on the recommendation of Clarence Brown. Huston and I must have worked on the script together for close to six months, and really very little work was done. No pages were turned in. We were mostly talking. He always did very little at the typewriter, anyway. The day would proceed. You'd arrive at his beach house at 9.30 or 10 a.m. and Huston would just be getting up for breakfast. He'd come down in this beautiful robe and play with the Weimaraner dog with blue eyes that he had just got. And if the dog had thrown up, which he often did, Huston would have to haul the carpets out on to the beach. Then, later, we'd have lunch, work a couple of hours, and it would come time to have a drink and so on. But we did finally get the script done.

P.McG.: Shortly after *The Asphalt Jungle*, you were blacklisted?

B.M.: I was blacklisted about 1952. At the time I was working on two films for Stanley Kramer. I had done a very rough, tentative version of *High Noon* from the novel [actually, a short story, 'The Tin Star', by John W. Cunningham], and a complete version of *The Wild One*.

Then Kramer called me into his office. 'I'm sorry, I have to fire you.' Well, so many people had already been fired that I didn't really need any further explanation. But I took my name off *The Wild One* because I saw a version of it that I disliked very much.

▼ *The Asphalt Jungle*: Sterling Hayden, Sam Jaffe, Louis Calhern.



Kiss the Blood Off My Hands: Joan Fontaine, Burt Lancaster. ▼



It was partly mine and partly not. That's always a very difficult thing, to assign the degree of responsibility for a script. I like to think that when a writer gets to heaven he's going to go to this huge file room, where they can look up his name and tell him precisely what his credits are.

— You seem to be relatively good-natured about the blacklist.

— There were very unfair things done, but you can't be bitter about it. My view is that the FBI had people in every left-wing organisation, often in prominent positions, and that they had complete lists [of leftists] all along. Their Hollywood campaign was not a malevolent and personal one. The general idea was to deny the Left funds, since the Hollywood people made a great deal of money.

— Wasn't it also a power struggle—among the unions and over who would produce the films?

— There might be some aspects of that, but I think the number of people who were on the Left in Hollywood was rather small, smaller than the percentage among New York intellectuals. And they were not governed by the same influences. In New York there was a whole ferment of political discussion, and other left-wing groups apart from Communist groups, *Partisan Review* and so on. The left-wingers here, like myself, were transplanted, in alien territory. In a way, the left-wing activity was a sop to the conscience.

P.McG.: Did you meet the writer-producer Philip Yordan before the blacklist?

B.M.: Never met him before. One of the great characters of the world. A friend of mine from Frontier Films named Irving Lerner, who was an editor and a director, was hired by Yordan to do a film: *Man Crazy* (1953). Irving was a wonderful editor but a terrible director. He just didn't know where to put the camera.

Yordan wanted a writer, so Irving recommended me, and of course I could be gotten very cheaply then. During the 50s I must have done—I really can't tell you how many—somewhere between six and ten scripts for Yordan. That's where everything becomes vague in the filmography, because some films that I never did have been credited to me. A friend sent me a notice from a Spanish newspaper recently, that said, 'Ben Maddow, hombre misterioso'. And it stated as bold fact that I had actually written all the Huston films of this period.

— When you first met Yordan, what was his rationalisation of what he was going to do, putting his name on the screenplay instead of yours?

— Oh, it was, 'I want you to write and of course you can't use your own name because you're in trouble, but I'll pay you fifty per cent... after all, on your best day, you could never make one-tenth of what I make.' It was true! But I was never sure of what percentage it actually was.

— So although he would be credited as writer, he would actually be behind the scenes, functioning like a producer?

— You know, Ben Hecht used to do the same thing. Hecht had a stable of writers down at the beach who would write for him. He would write the original two pages or so in Hechtian style, and since he had an enormous reputation, he would get a lot of money for it. Then they would sit down and do the screenplay in Hechtian style. Maybe Hecht would add a few flourishes, but he made a great deal of money that way. That was all very well known here.

— Were there other people in the Yordan stable besides yourself?

— Oh, yes. But I think that during this period I must have done all the things Yordan did. He was always buying books, he had a dozen [properties] going at any one time. He would stack the books up in rows and sell them to the

studio on the basis of the cover-photo. He would show the covers to the producers. 'This is what I own,' he would say.

— Did he have any politics?

— None whatever. Only Yordan. But he did keep saying to me, 'I feel ashamed because you are really a fine cabinet-maker.' He had some guilt.

— Did he have good ideas as a producer?

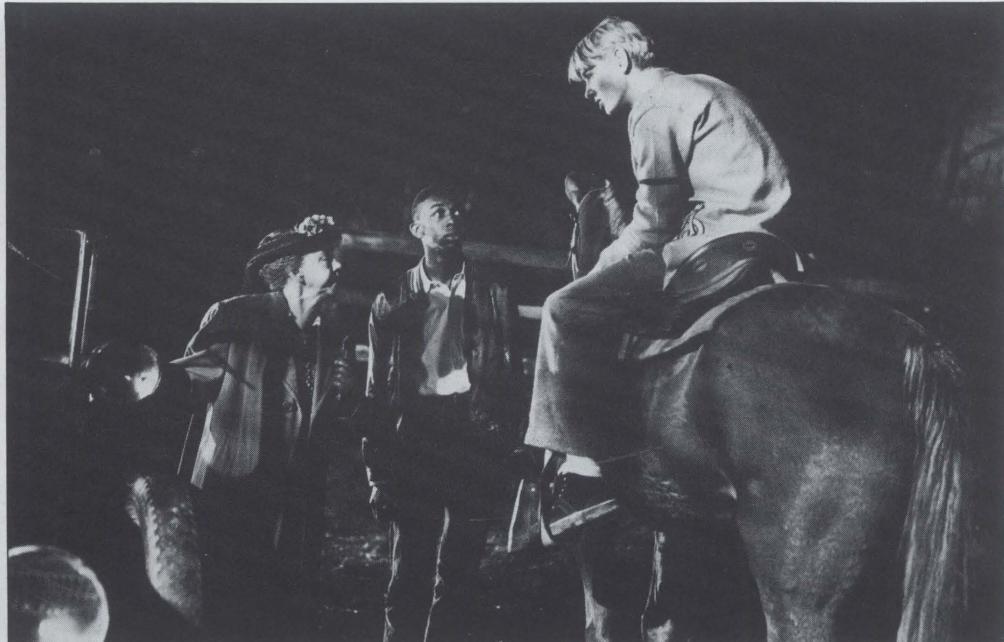
— Occasionally. And if you gave him a good idea, he'd steal it from himself later on. There's an idea in *Men and War* (1957) in which the platoon commander is killed, they strap him into this jeep, and they drive him around as though he is alive just to keep up morale. Well, Yordan used exactly the same idea in *El Cid* (1961), where the guy is strapped to a saddle.

That brings me to a story about Yordan. Somewhere along the line he said to me, 'I'm sure we could sell a Western—there's always a market for one. Have you got an idea for a Western?' This is a Thursday and I said, 'Well, no, but I'll think about it.' So I came back with an idea for him on Monday and he said, 'Fine.' He didn't really want to listen to it too much, he just said, 'Do it. And get the screenplay done as fast as possible. I'd like it done in three weeks.'

I actually wrote the screenplay in about three and a half weeks, and when I brought it back, he sort of cursorily looked at it to see how many pages it was. It was 134 pages, so that was okay. He changed the names of the characters because he carried with him a little book that said things like, 'James means noble'.

He said, 'Now, we have to go to work.' I said, 'What work?'—expecting him to talk about revisions. He said, 'Now come with me.' He sat in the study, and he called Simon and Schuster and said that he had just sold a screenplay of a Western to Warner Brothers and were they interested in the book from which it was taken? Well, yes, they would be

▼ *Intruder in the Dust*: Elizabeth Patterson, Elzie Emmanuel, Claude Jarman Jr.



interested. Then he called the script department at Warner Brothers and told them he had sold a book to Simon and Schuster and would they be interested in the screenplay? He'd send it over right away, which he did.

He sat there and worried for about three-quarters of an hour. Then he said, 'This is really very shaky, I've got to make this certain.' He called up a minor executive at Warner Brothers and said, 'I know you owe \$14,000 in Vegas. I will pay that sum for you and get you out of trouble. All I want you to do is the following: I have sent a script over to Jack Warner. It has a blue cover and is called *Man of the West*. Get to it before he does in the morning, pick it up, and return it at four o'clock and say, "I picked this script up by mistake, instead of mine, and I started reading and I couldn't put it down." That's all I want you to do.'

He had to pay the \$14,000, but so what? Because the screenplay was sold. Now he called Simon and Schuster and told them he was going to send them the book manuscript right away because the film was going to be made. So I had to sit down and write the novel *Man of the West*. It was published in *Collier's* in three sections. We split everything fifty-fifty, although I don't know that for sure because I never saw any contracts.

—Did you ever meet the directors of these various films? Nicholas Ray?

—Never saw him. Well, I might have met him once.

—Anthony Mann?

—Not to my memory.

—I have interviewed Philip Yordan. I also spoke with Bernie Gordon and Milton Sperling, who at one time or another collaborated with Yordan. Gordon and Arnaud D'Usseau, both blacklisted, ghosted for Yordan in the 1960s. Yordan has me stumped on one thing. He was frank about some things, evasive about others, but on one matter he wouldn't budge—that was *Johnny*

Guitar (1954). He insists he wrote *Johnny Guitar*.

—Well, I looked at some of the film over at my daughter's house recently, and frankly I can't remember working on it. But if I looked at any of the others, I probably wouldn't recall them either. I don't think, for any of these movies, that I ever saw anything beyond a rough cut. And if you work on something for six or eight weeks—and this was 35 years ago—you forget.

—You sent me a list of films you had written, including those which you scripted under the table in the 50s, and *Johnny Guitar* is on that list. What has made you claim it as a credit?

—All I can say is that I can't tell you if I wrote it or not. This filmography in which I'm credited with things I never did comes from France. A number of films are listed that I was supposed to have done for Philip Yordan. Perhaps I thought their information was accurate. It probably corresponded with some of the things I remembered and since I think *Johnny Guitar* was on the list, that may have been how it was lodged in my memory. The French are very big on B-films. Their idea of an American literary hero was Edgar Allan Poe.

—Were you constrained at all in the writing of these films by the fact that they were so impersonal to you?

—Yes, but I didn't think they were that different from what other people were doing. I didn't feel as though I was being punished in some way. Punishment was that I couldn't use my name. Some of the films were probably pretty bad, because I didn't give a damn about the subject matter, but I tried at least to be ingenious.

—Did you feel particularly proprietary about any of them?

—Maybe *God's Little Acre* [1958], which I don't think was the greatest book about the South ever written because, after all, I do admire Faulkner, who was a far more profound writer. But there was some truth in Erskine Caldwell.

—How did you end up feeling about Yordan?

—I never had a fight with him or anything. You couldn't fight the guy. In many ways he was very sweet. He was only doing what to him was a business.

The work itself saved my life. But I also had a terrible psychological complex about it. In fact, I was close to a breakdown. At that point, I went into analysis. I didn't know it at the time, I didn't make the connection, which became very obvious, but it was an abdication of oneself. Because here were your ideas, which are very close to you, closer to you than you think as a writer—here was part of your personality, not attached to your name, up there on the screen.

P.McG.: What happened when you came out of the blacklist?

B.M.: The whole thing was falling apart, the blacklist, and as I understand it by implication from my agent, though I have no proof of it, the agency were very anxious for me to make more money for them. So they paid Rep Donald Jackson, who was then a representative on one of the committees, to erase my name from the lists. He died maybe three or four years after this happened, and there is no way of proving it at all. After that, bit by bit, I went back to work, though I didn't start at the same point; I had to start lower down. By this time I had been forgotten in the industry, really. I don't know whether that supposed payment did the trick, or whether there was actually a lapse in the whole system of the blacklist. Such arrangements were being made all over the place.

—You never talked to Jackson?

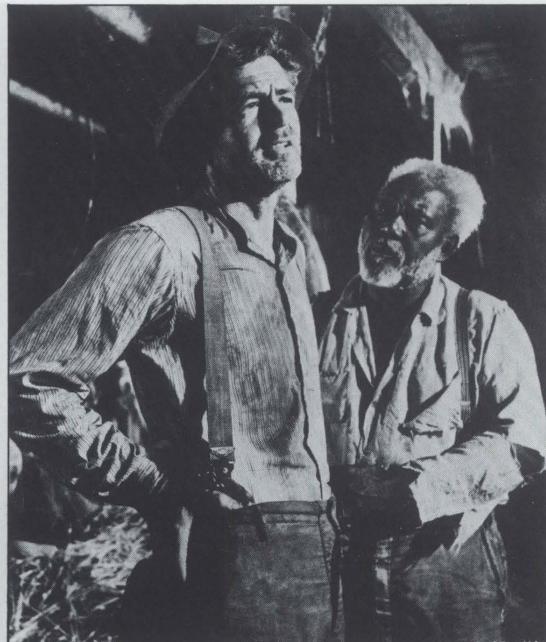
—I went to see Rep Jackson in Santa Monica. I signed some sort of statement. I can't remember what was in it. I never took a copy.

—The screenwriter Walter Bernstein tells me that when he was in Hollywood in the late 50s, you told him you were

▼ *Johnny Guitar*: Nicholas Ray, Harry Stradling, Joan Crawford; and perhaps Philip Yordan (right).



God's Little Acre: Robert Ryan, Rex Ingram. ▼



working with Kazan. He said he had breakfast with you and you told him you had named some names for the Committee.

—I don't recall any such conversation.

—Did you not name any names?

—Well, it might have been in the statement, but I don't recall.

—You don't consider yourself a cooperative witness?

—Well, I did cooperate. Obviously. I signed a statement.

—But you insist you don't remember what the statement said. What was that meeting like? Was Jackson trying to extract some information from you?

—Oh, no. He was already rather ill and he wanted to get it over with. It was formally an Executive Session, or something like that.

—Didn't working with Kazan on *Wild River* give you a kind of twinge?

—Oh, no. I thought it was a fascinating experience. Actually, most of the time I worked with Kazan, I was doing research in the South and he wasn't even around. But I did have several conferences with him and finally did a script on the TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority] question, which I was very interested in, having gone through that same period myself. Maybe my script was no good. I don't remember. Kazan told me he wanted somebody who had more experience organising the material. There was a prolific amount of fascinating material. I think he was right, incidentally. One of the things I've struggled with all my life is organisation. I didn't want any credit on the final script of *Wild River* because it was so obviously the work of another man and superior writer, Paul Osborn. A very good technician.

—You had spent so many years on the blacklist, and you had not been working publicly, using your own name in films. Wasn't it terribly convenient that Kazan would come to you at this point?

—I think probably he would not have hired me if I had not signed it [the HUAC

statement]. Obviously! But it didn't make any difference to me that it was Kazan. I always regarded Kazan as a very talented man. A complex man, of course. I never had the measured feeling that a lot of these people had, people like Alvah Bessie and Albert Maltz. I regarded myself as caught between two sets of ideologues. I don't regard myself as having done something wrong by cooperating. Conscience had nothing to do with it: it was a question of whether I would support my family or not. And since I didn't owe allegiance to either of these ideologies, it didn't matter to me. I thought they were equally foolish.

—Did you not feel an affinity with the other Hollywood leftists?

—I suppose I did. But I never became friendly with them.

—Did you not think of yourself as a leftist?

—Sure. But never in a conventional sense. Because there's much of Marx I always felt was just silly. The anthropological parts of Engels are just ridiculous, and people took them very, very seriously. Any theory, when matched up with life, doesn't begin to deal with complexity. And I'm interested in complexity.

I disagreed with a lot of the policies of the Party and said so. What is unfair about the blacklist is that it is a question of terminology. Because actually the Communist Party here was more like left socialists, not even that, compared with European standards. It's hopeless to think the Communist Party could overthrow anything here. I mean, what did they have, 20,000 members? Of which, I'm sure, 1,000 were FBI men!

—Did you ever have cause to regret signing the HUAC statement?

—No, I don't think so.

—Once the blacklist ended, at least for you, did that stigma continue to affect your career?

—Only in the sense that when I was back in harness, so to speak, I might have done films that I wouldn't have

done otherwise, had I not been blacklisted. Had I not been blacklisted I would have become better-known and would have commanded a higher price, and therefore could have been more selective. It hurt the momentum of my career, if you think of it as a career in screenplay-writing, which I never did.

Although Maddow, like many others, could not recover the lost ground of the blacklist years, his later credits remain interesting. He collaborated with Joseph Strick on *The Savage Eye* (1960) and the Jean Genet adaptation *The Balcony* (1963). ('I like *The Savage Eye* quite a lot, even though there were excesses in the writing. But on the whole it is a single tone, even if that tone is of lurid colours.') He did another turn with Huston, on *The Unforgiven* ('Huston was not very fond of the project'). His more routine credits of the 1960s include *Two Loves* ('a pretty good script but the director was terrible'), *The Way West* ('another piece of junk') and *The Chairman* ('just a job'). And in 1963 he made his own first dramatic feature without a co-director, *An Affair of the Skin*, which has never been released in Britain. 'Directing is much harder than you think, but it's also far more thrilling. Here at last you are God. You're not some subordinate cherubim.'

Ben Maddow's last screen credit was for the occult curiosity *The Mephisto Waltz* (1971), in which the heroine is a victim of a satanic cult who achieves a dubious revenge by meticulously staging her own death. Since then, he has written books about photography and also novels ('at this point in my life I find it tremendously enjoyable'). He still lives in Hollywood. ■

Excerpted, with permission, from 'Back-story 2: Interviews with Screenwriters of the 1940s and 1950s', edited by Patrick McGilligan, to be published by the University of California Press.

▼ *Man of the West*: 'Have you got an idea for a Western...?' ▼





DEATH TAXES

A PROFILE OF JUZO ITAMI BY JEFFREY SIPE

Even today, critics, film distributors and especially theatre owners lament the passing of the Golden Age of Japanese cinema some 20 to 25 years ago. After the flurry of activity from such film-makers as Kurosawa and Mizoguchi in the 50s and 60s—activity which was complemented by the socially aware and highly politicised films of Nagisa Oshima, Kiju Yoshida and Shōhei Imamura—Japan's cinema became primarily 'dead air', brought to life intermittently by a handful of powerful films which all seemed to come from directors who had established themselves in the 'Golden Age'.

On the commercial front, the lack of quality domestic films, later in combination with the familiar effects of the video boom, has seen Japanese cinema ticket sales plummet from nearly a billion in 1962 to about one-eighth of that figure in 1988. And domestic films have taken the brunt of this drop.

Enter Juzo Itami. At the age of 49, Itami came up with the highly improbable idea of making a film about a funeral, and even more improbably entitling it *Ososhiki* (*The Funeral*, a title which the film's British distributors insisted on changing to *Death, Japanese Style*—and who can blame them). Understandably, film financiers balked at investing in a picture which they doubted audiences would perceive as a 'fun night out at the movies', thus leaving Itami to his own devices.

A few years earlier, Itami had directed a promotional film for Yasushi Tamaoki, head of an Osaka-based family enterprise centred on a generations-old Japanese sweets business. Itami persuaded Tamaoki to provide part of his \$1m budget, and he and his wife and leading actress, Nobuko Miyamoto, mortgaged their home to secure the rest of the money.

The idea for *Ososhiki* grew out of his own responsibilities in making the arrangements for his father-in-law's funeral a few years earlier. 'My wife's father died suddenly of a heart attack,' Itami says. 'Experiencing his funeral first hand, I said to myself, "This is a movie." The first day it was raining heavily; the second day it was foggy; and the third day it was clear with a gusty wind—even the weather was cine-

matographic. On the third day, while we were waiting for the cremation, all of us sort of looked up and a thin smoke came out of the chimney. I felt as if we were in a scene from an Ozu movie.'

Although friends say that his face is just now beginning to show his age, Itami's clothing reflects a youthful, non-conformist personality. For a recent interview, he relaxed in his Roppongi office dressed in an old coalminer's jacket loosely draped over a high-collared dark-blue Chinese tunic and black velvet jeans. He reflects on the socio-cultural implications of the death ritual.

Funerals are a ritual belonging to the old traditional community that we have discarded in exchange for modernisation. Funerals today exist as a mirror of the family system, human relations, values, view of life and death and even cosmology of our traditional rice-growing villages. Today, we Japanese live primarily as consumers in a very advanced capitalist society, but when someone dies, a set of customs

from that old community is suddenly resurrected and captures us.

'Most Japanese today have no choice but to follow the ritual blindly because it's a tradition, without knowing its significance or history. So, funerals are where the old Japan crosses with the modern Japan. Therefore, a funeral is extremely handy material which, even depicted in the most straightforward way, can beautifully picture the contradictions between the old and the modern Japan.'

These contradictions are at the centre of most of Itami's four films to date, and apparently stem as much from the jolting changes which have rocked twentieth-century Japan as from his own personal experience. Although his films are hailed by many foreign critics as 'very 1980s', he feels a stronger kinship with the older generation of Japanese film-makers. 'I may be younger, but I'm not really all that different from those who were making films during the 50s. I've seen war and

The Funeral.



defeat and experienced the tremendous impact all this had on our psyche.'

Itami was born in 1933, and grew up in Kyoto. Fortunate enough not to experience the war face-to-face (Kyoto was spared the bombing that left Tokyo devastated), Itami lost his father to TB at the age of twelve, shortly after the end of the Second World War. His father, Mansaku Itami, was one of Japan's most celebrated early directors and essayists. All but one of his films, *Akamishi Kakita*, have been rendered nearly unwatchable by time and the elements, but his essays have survived.

'I can't say that his films have been an influence on mine, but when I was younger I read his essays over and over, and they have certainly left an impression on me... I think for any child it's difficult to live up to standards set by a parent. It's like crossing a great mountain; if one has lived for a long time, one will eventually feel capable of doing it. I was almost fifty when I started directing—I didn't feel ready to climb until then.'

'My father was born in 1900, and wanted to become a painter. But there was no way he could make a living as an artist, so he went through a friend to get hired by a film studio. Eventually, he was able to direct films.'

Itami has led an extremely independent life for a postwar Japanese, since even many actors and actresses are forced to become part of the Japanese studio system, complete with both the comfort and the confinement offered by studio contracts. Although widely regarded by his fellow countrymen as one of Japan's most erudite but most popular intellectuals, Itami's formal education was limited to the completion of high school. He left home at the age of sixteen (his mother and sister in the care of friends of his father), completed

high school and started work as a layout artist. In his early twenties he entered the ring as an amateur welterweight ('a fair boxer,' he says), moved on to acting, TV journalism, essay writing, refinement of a latent interest in French food, and was able to combine all the above (except the boxing) into various forms of successful film and media projects. He even edited a short-lived magazine on psychoanalysis, a project which he began after he 'saw the light' by way of psychoanalysis.

'I worked on a project with a publisher for a series of books which paired an artist with an academic to make it easier for the general public to understand academic inquiry. I was scheduled rather early in the series, and I had thought that I would like to work on Marx or Freud. Marx was reserved for someone else, so I got Freud. It was one of a series of lecture books which was a dialogue between myself and the academic.'

'I was impressed in many different ways. Let me see. I think a great key to understanding human beings is one's relationships with one's parents. Freud is the person who discovered that life is led rather like a kind of hypnosis. When we are young, various types of hypnotic suggestion are given to us. Freud treated many cases of hysteria in Vienna, and used hypnosis for his treatment. And he came to the following conclusions. A person who is given an hypnotic suggestion will act on it. This behaviour can't be explained by one's consciousness... Using this kind of Freudian explanation, one can look at Japanese society as being a mother/child-based society. In the West, the father figure is strong, but in Japan it is very weak.'

As an actor, in addition to appearing in such critically acclaimed films as *The*

Makioka Sisters and *The Yen Family* and Oshima's *Treatise on Japanese Bawdy Songs*, Itami worked with Nicholas Ray and Charlton Heston on *55 Days in Peking* (1963), playing a Chinese. He also appeared in *Lord Jim* (1964).

Essays on these experiences, in addition to his thoughts on cars, food, acting, travel, fashion and a host of other subjects can be found in his book *Listen, Women!*. The collection of essays was not written about or for women, and, confides Itami, 'The title was the publisher's idea.'

His most recent book, *Furansu Ryori o Watakashi to (Enjoy French Cooking with Me)*, was published in 1987, although written much earlier, and is something of a Japanese version of *My Dinner with André*. In it, Itami visits a number of scholars and intellectuals, prepares dinner and then sits down for a delicious meal and equally delicious conversation. A description of the food's preparation (complete with recipe) is followed by the transcript of a conversation which may centre on history, biology, psychology or Japanese popular culture. The cookbook is, in many ways, an outgrowth of Itami's TV days as something of a roving reporter, visiting odd places and conversing for the cameras with people from all levels of society.

After the success of *The Funeral*, Itami set to work on *Tampopo*, his Buñuel-esque, ramen (noodle) Western, which is probably his most popular film internationally. 'In *The Funeral* I wanted to sketch in the manner of Chekhov, and *Tampopo*'s free form came partly from Buñuel. I initially worked up about twelve skits about food, but I needed a core. I remembered Buñuel's *The Phantom of Liberty* and thought I would tell my story like that. I would have the stranger arrive in town like a modern cowboy and teach a woman how to make noodles and the skits would spin off from that... .

'When your first film is very successful, I think there is a tendency for critics to tear down your second one. But the audience is the final judge, and the fact that *Tampopo* was simply a funny film was not enough to attract present-day Japanese audiences, especially in the winter season. In Japan, it was not a "must-see" film... In America, originality, risk-taking and creativity are looked upon with respect, but they are not considered desirable in Japan. Even so, it was a real surprise when the film became so successful in America. I felt as if the American people had discovered me.'

'Most of the biggest hits in Japan in recent years have been worthless as film. They plug these films through the media and spread presold tickets like confetti. The films generate billions of yen before they even hit the screen... It seems that the Japanese are a people who just don't like thinking at all. Those who grew up during the 1960s entered a kind of cultural vacuum. They simply aren't aware of what goes on

Tampopo.



outside Japan; they see themselves as the navel of the universe.'

The 'presold tickets' Itami refers to are part of a uniquely Japanese practice which is perhaps a logical outgrowth of 'Japan Inc'. The involvement of Japanese TV networks in domestic productions ensures free commercial time for nationwide exposure of a particular film. Additionally, some films such as *Dun Huang*, an abysmal rendition of a fascinating novel by Yoshio Inoue, involve groups of companies which are able to presell discount tickets to their own employees and, by calling in past favours, to other major corporations, which in turn sell to their employees. It is a rare company that escapes this obligation.

Itami refers to his own childhood: 'I didn't experience war itself, but the education at the time was very rightist. The biggest influence on my thinking, however, came in the days after Japan's defeat in 1945. Everyone believed the Japanese were gods and the Americans were devils, and that every single Japanese should kill many Americans. When the war was lost, all of us kids made spears from bamboo, in order to kill the Americans. Then, after a few weeks, the Americans landed and everybody changed their opinion. Democracy was in, militarism was out, and MacArthur was a god. Everything was turned on its head.'

'The Americans had so much. For example, I was dazzled by the whiteness of the loaves of bread that they distributed to us. Even that seemed to us to be a very wealthy, luxury item. Japanese matches were thin and weak with hardly any tip on them, and they wouldn't light when we struck them. But American matches were thick, had a large tip, and would light up easily. The wood of those matches was so white!'

'We would all crowd around their jeeps. I don't know if the American troops were told to be nice to children or if they really liked children, but they were very good to us. But the point I am trying to make is that as a result of this, I could no longer believe in any one thing, any one value, any one standard of justice. I realised that in a war, one type of justice is pitted against another, and you can't say that it's good versus bad. I learned from the experience of 1945 that I should be wary when the Japanese all seem to espouse the same values and cry for the same things... And that is what I am pointing out in my films. Now the Japanese are single-mindedly pursuing money as the key value in life. And that is what I deal with in *Marusa no Onna* (A Taxing Woman).'

Marusa no Onna grew out of the experience of *Ososhiki*. Although successful in most of his previous endeavours, Itami suddenly found himself in a new tax bracket and his interest was piqued. 'I sought cooperation from the Director General of the National Tax Administration Agency and interviewed inspectors at the Tokyo Regional

Tax Administration Bureau, former inspectors and auditors at district tax offices. I also interviewed tax evaders, including adult motel owners, pinball parlour owners, real estate agents and business racketeers.'

'In the first stages of pre-production, I switched my daily newspaper from the [mass circulation] *Asahi* to the *Nihon Keizai* [a Japanese Financial Times]. I also read about a hundred detective and spy stories and corporate novels and non-fiction works in order to get myself accustomed to crime story writing. My knowledge of tax and accounting matters was near zero. Without research, I wouldn't have been able to write a line. Luckily, in any professional or social circle in this world, there are some who like to talk and some who are good story-tellers. My screenplay owes all its details to these people.'

Death and taxes may be the only certainties in this world, but neither is a particularly enticing subject on which many film-makers would centre entire films. Itami's idea in *Marusa no Onna* was to use the tax game as a path to a deeper understanding of his characters and the Japanese people in general. 'Money is in a way an alter ego of each person. Collecting and evading taxes, therefore, is a struggle about a taxpayer's ego. Accordingly, taxes in *Marusa no Onna* are a device to strip people.'

'The human ego is very fragile. Because it has no grounds for existence in itself, it needs something outside to support it. The Japanese once found support in the family and the state. Today, they rely for the stability of their egos on the companies they work for. The particular value companies believe in is productivity. Productivity boils down to money. Consequently, Japanese values inevitably converge on

money. So much so that in Japan today money may be considered to have taken the place of religion. *Marusa no Onna* was meant as a mirror for the Japanese people whose values are unified in money. But I think *Marusa no Onna II* (A Taxing Woman's Return) is a more accurate reflection of what Japan is like today.'

Starring in both films is Nobuko Miyamoto, Itami's wife of twenty years. He often jokes that the real reason he uses her is because it saves him money, just as he has claimed that the real reason he finances his own pictures is because he does not want to share the profits. Certainly, there is more here than meets the eye. Friends say that Miyamoto is a major driving force in Itami's life, and that may account for the similarities between her and Ryoko, the tax-inspector heroine of the two *Marusa no Onna* films. The major difference between the two is, ironically, physical. It is a bit disconcerting to meet Miyamoto in person after having become accustomed to the bobbed hair and freckles of Ryoko, or the aproned noodle-shop owner, Tampopo. She is an elegantly beautiful woman who is given to expressive gesticulation as her mind moves rapidly from thought to thought. Not, perhaps, so different from Ryoko.

'I created Ryoko rather like a female version of Colombo,' Itami says. 'She's short, freckled, hardy and competent, likes to work and has a strong sense of responsibility; yet she has a sense of humour and is even feminine. A character like this is probably more American than Japanese.'

Itami was previously married to a ballet dancer, and it was because of her that he spent some time in London many years ago. It was there he believes that he acquired his somewhat

A Taxing Woman: Nobuko Miyamoto.



non-Japanese sense of humour, a reference to which brings an interviewer a happy 'thank you'. 'My films have quite a bit of black humour, or sick humour and satire which doesn't exist much in Japan. Satire is a tradition in Japanese film and literature, but it is not communicable to foreign audiences. My own films are probably able to communicate the satire because I am looking at Japanese culture from the outside. I am distancing myself from it.'

The idea of breaking out of one's own culture in order to get a clearer view of it is a favourite topic of Itami's. 'Japan is like one giant family. I've tended to view the society the way a psychoanalyst observes a family. The members of any family think their conditions are normal. For example, if the husband beats his wife every day, or if the mother abuses her child, it may seem very strange to an outsider, but those inside the family think it's natural. After all, that's their reality. There's no way for them to understand that their situation is abnormal, unless they can somehow step outside the household. This basic objectivity is what is missing in Japan. There is never an external view: in general, Japanese can't understand themselves without experiencing the culture shock of leaving the country. Japan needs to establish a framework and a language for viewing and reassessing its culture from the outside.'

Itami's idea of how to help bring this about involves a three-step process. The first is Westerners appearing in very Japanese movies. The second is to have Japanese actors speaking English in very Japanese movies. The last step is Japanese actors appearing in Japanese movies with international appeal.

A Taxing Woman's Return.



In his first effort as executive producer, *Sweet Home*, a horror film which is now being subtitled, Itami made a move toward realising his proposed first step by introducing an American special-effects team led by Hollywood make-up wizard Dick Smith to Japanese audiences. He is now in the process of realising something akin to the second step, as he is closeted with a well-known American writer working on a screenplay which will probably go before the cameras sometime this autumn and be released next January. Itami so far refuses to reveal the name of the writer or the specifics of the screenplay. He is, however, quite willing to give an extensive answer which indeed culminates in at least the reasons behind such a collaboration.

'The strongest characteristic of Japanese culture is that there is no father. Relations between people are very direct, and are patterned after the relationship of a baby to its mother. In societies that share the Christian tradition, there is an intermediate entity between one person and another that is perceived as larger than the individual, some external system. There are laws and contracts, there is God, there are principles. At any rate, Westerners relate to each other within the framework of some external consensual frame of reference.

'In Japan people relate to each other one-to-one and if they feel good, then all is well. Japanese relationships don't have a "third person", though I think they should. In the family context, the father should play the role of preventing the relationship between the child and the mother from becoming too rosy. Instead, Japanese have only two models—the baby role and the mother role. The mother role is played by the

big all-embracing organisations which promote self-denial. The other ideal is the child role, where everyone is encouraged to be pure, innocent, gentle and meek, or what is approvingly known as *kawaii* [cute].

'This situation comes from a long way back. In ancient Japan there must have been something that developed into a paternal mechanism appropriate to that society. Samurai society would have had its own paternal mechanism and likewise the merchant society. No society can develop without something to rein in the children, teach them to control their desires. It was not the people themselves that played this role, but rather the conditions of life—poverty, the rigours of hard work. The harsh facts of life played the role of the father. In postwar Japan, however, with the extremely rapid economic growth, poverty and hard labour have suddenly disappeared. Now there is nothing to play the role of the father, and the basic operative factor in society is, if it feels good, it's fine.'

'I think that is the Japan of today. And it's a very big problem. Japan is being thrust on to the world stage among societies which do have paternal mechanisms. We are being forced to get along with those other societies, and the principle of good feelings is not going to work by itself. For now, Japan is using money as the third force, as the common ground between itself and foreign countries. Who knows how long this can last? If Japan's partners eventually come round to refusing to continue on this footing, then it will become necessary to develop some kind of technological, paternalistic mechanism for Japanese society. I think we're being swept along towards such an era.'

'From this perspective, I am planning to make communication the theme of my next film. If we Japanese can see ourselves as having become wholly that sort of society, and can recognise how this looks from the point of view of other societies, then maybe some sort of response will be forthcoming. I'm not talking about the Japanese becoming like Europeans. I don't think the peculiar characteristics of Japanese culture should be lost. The point is that we don't yet have a good way to relate to European societies.'

In all his projects to date, Itami has striven for perfection, and his future projects will, no doubt, reflect this powerful drive. In assessing his own impact on Japanese cinema, he speaks not with an uncharacteristic humility but with self-assurance and in the end, perhaps, with an unpompous realism. 'I would want to be the hope for Japanese film. The Japanese film world is a closed society, like Japan itself. It needs to look outward and to be more exposed to the outside world to gain a different perspective. With the success of *Tampopo*, I was fortunate to be able to communicate with the outside world. And I would like to change Japanese film-making by taking in this more international perspective.'

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now about THESE WOMEN

'An Englishman,' observed Laurence Sterne rather sniffily, 'does not travel to see Englishmen.' The general principle may well hold good in, say, the Greek Islands; but for seven British filmmakers, the chance of meeting their fellow countrywomen proved one of the chief pleasures of the 11th *Cinema e Donne* Festival in Florence last March. 'It sounds really ridiculous,' comments Lezli-An Barrett, director of *Business As Usual*. 'There were all these stimulating international people, but the most interesting part of the festival for me was the fact that I met, for the first time in my life, other British women directors.'

Barrett's delight at making contacts is echoed by the rest of the British contingent. Jane Balfour who, as a leading sales agent for independent production, represents many of the women from all over the world featured at the festival, welcomed the chance to chat informally, away from a market atmosphere. For the others—documentary-maker Toni de Bromhead, producer Jenni Howarth, writer Noella Smith, director Conny Templeman and Canadian film-maker Harriet Pacaud (substituting for camerawoman Belinda Parsons)—the festival turned into something of a reunion: all are graduates of the National Film & Television School.

It was this connection with the NFTS which originally inspired the festival's organisers, Marisa d'Archangelo and Paola Paoli, to invite the women to come and talk about their experiences. 'In Italy at the moment there's a great interest in English cinema,' explains de Bromhead, who is currently working in Florence and was involved in setting up the festival, 'so they wanted to feature the work of Englishwomen. In particular they wanted to look at five aspects of film-making—directing, camera, writing, producing and distribution—and wanted women who could represent each area.'

'But Italy is also going through a crisis of confidence in its own cinema. They don't think they're producing anything worthwhile and are looking for ways to deal with this. So I told them about the National Film School and

about my year, which was 1977 and had included Conny, Jenni and Belinda. Noella came later, but she was very much part of our group. So it was decided to focus the debates on training and film schools.'

As usual at such events, the level of debate varied. Discussion was somewhat trammelled, too, by the absence of delegates from Italy's main film school, Lina Wertmüller's Centro Sperimentale, who failed to show up. There were women, however, from Olmi's set-up at Bassano which, although not a school, does provide some—rather problematic—film-making experience (and access to slots on RAI-TV) for a chosen few.

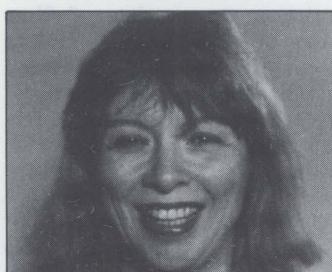
In all, though, it seems that film training in Italy—especially for women—leaves a lot to be desired, and that the English experience is looked to for inspiration. 'The Italians were very warm towards us,' observes Conny Templeman, whose first feature, *Nanou*, opened the festival. 'They obviously thought that here in England we were making wonderful films—that we had it good. They wanted to hear how that had come about. They were interested in how the Film School was structured. They still seem to be struggling with the practicalities, finding out how to make these things work.'

'It was very interesting talking to the others, to see how we were feeling about what we had done, and where we were five years later, or whatever it is since leaving film school. But I had expected more intellectual debate from the festival as a whole—on the level of talking about films, about what films should be made. There was very little of that. It was a very small festival, but I had hoped to see more women there who were actively engaged in thinking about what we should be writing about, reading, seeing.'

Noella Smith, whose *Secrets* and *Careless Talk* were shown at the festival, takes up the point: 'I would have liked more talk about the sort of themes that could be handled, or whether we should be looking at different themes. I would have liked a good old debate, and challenging arguments about cinema; where it's going, and where we want to



HOWARTH



SMITH



BALFOUR



BARRETT



TEMPLEMAN



Jennifer Howarth; *Ladder of Swords*.

be going within it. But you have to remember that everything had to be translated, so in an hour only half an hour's conversation could be had, and it didn't have the normal kind of flow. The translators did very well but it made it rather unnatural.'

However unsatisfying the debates, the festival as a whole seems to have been a great success. 'It was wonderful,' Smith continues, 'to see lots of films made by lots of other women, and to talk about our experiences. I came back pretty excited, questioning where I'd been going with my work and determined to cut out parochial subjects.'

'A lot of the women's films I saw were too introspective. Maybe women are good at them but when you see them all together a pattern emerges—all these women in not very good relationships with not very nice men. I don't want just to be making films that honour women. I want to be making films that a large audience enjoys, obviously that don't degrade or stereotype women, but not just honouring them. Which is ironic, because they gave me an award for *Careless Talk*, which is about women in an internment camp on the Isle of Man, on the grounds that it honours women...'

The opportunity to see one's own work from the outside is also what Jenni Howarth, producer of *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (an enormous hit in Italy), *On the Black Hill*, and the forthcoming *Ladder of Swords*, values most about Florence and other festivals. 'It's very important to have a space sometimes to re-think, to touch base, and to examine what you're doing—to think about why you're doing it, and what the implications are. Whether it's as a woman making films—and then it is important to talk to other women filmmakers—or generally. You need to clarify what the point of all this hard work is.'

Howarth, like her other contemporaries at the Film School, believes that they were exceptionally lucky in having been able to attend the NFTS exactly when they did. Belinda Parsons, perhaps the most critical of the graduates, suggests part of that luck was that 'the mood, the climate, in '77 was really ripe for educational institutions to take a reasonable proportion of women. The School obviously tried very hard and they managed to choose ten women out of the 25 new entrants, which was way higher than anything before, and I don't think it's been as

high since. It was disproportionate since there were many more male applicants, but it was a good year.'

'The other thing was that we were taken on essentially as political apathetics, because the School had just about had its fill of very difficult political factions with the previous years. It meant we were a lot more homogeneous than previous years. But it did mean that when I arrived at the Film School the atmosphere was very lively. There was a lot of debate, a lot of disagreement, and there was real theoretical discussion going on. Not a lot of creative thought, but a lot of theory which was very enjoyable, and very inspiring. But that has almost entirely gone since those politically strong people left.'

Another enlivening factor was that at that time, six years after the School had opened, the teaching style was still evolving. 'When we went to the National Film School,' explains Howarth, 'it was structured up to a point, but to a large extent after the first term what you did depended on you. It also depended on what you asked for. My experience was that what you asked for you could get. But you had to ask.'

One thing that could be asked for was tuition from the film-maker of your choice—over and above the guests invited in by the School. At the time there were no permanent teachers; tutors were drawn from working professionals and given a short-term contract. Among those who passed through the school in those years were Joan Churchill, Nell Dunn, Jim Goddard, Jack Gold, Walter Lassally, Alexander Mackendrick, Trevor Preston, David Puttnam, Karel Reisz, Diana Rushton, Diane Tammes, Ken Trodd, Billy Williams and Krzysztof Zanussi.

Particularly influential was a series of workshops run by Lynda Myles. Templeman feels that Myles 'had considerable influence on those of us who went to her seminars. Lynda brought films that were either about women or made by women. Personally, that had a lasting effect on me. There we talked about what the problems were—analysed the films and talked about them.'

By the time Noella Smith arrived, a little more structure had been imposed on the School (not entirely, according to Parsons, to the students' advantage), but her experience wasn't unlike that of her predecessors. 'We all did everything. We were broken into groups of six, and we'd make a film together and rotate roles every day. So by the end of the first term everybody had done everything—camera, sound, lighting, editing, directing, producing, the lot. Then we'd have documentary sessions and drama sessions and so on, and we each had to study a film in depth. I studied Milos Forman's *The Firemen's Ball*'.

One innovation was the setting of specific exercises for first-year students. 'Karel Reisz came down and showed us *Dog Soldiers* with a crucial scene missing, and we were broken up into

Noella Smith; *Secrets*.



groups and each had to direct the scene. Then the scenes were compared, and then we looked at what Reisz had done. After that, we were each given a different film—again with a scene cut out of it—and had to direct that. I did Billy Wilder's *The Apartment*. Mike Newell came down as my tutor to look at what I'd done and tell me how he would have done it, or how he thought Wilder would have done it. Then we both looked at the scene—Wilder had done it in about two takes.'

Belinda Parsons, though, found the School less to her liking. 'As a place to train as a technician it was wonderful, but I discovered that the Film School had no sense of creativity, or really even of film-making, only of the technical processes—how to get there. You can train to be a technician in the industry; but you can't get the room, the time or the facilities necessarily to get yourself on the road creatively, which I felt was the main reason for the Film School existing.'

Three main factors, Parsons considers, militated against the more creative side of film-making: the replacement, in her second year, of working professionals by full-time teachers who, in the case of camera at least, were reluctant to call in outside film-makers; the location of the School out at Beaconsfield, which curtailed the time that could be spent there by students who didn't have their own transport; and the system whereby students had relatively large personal budgets to dispose of to the benefit of their own careers.

This last factor, she argues, 'seemed to overpower people. A director would go around choosing crew by their ability to pay rather than their suitability. You could make a couple of good documentaries and a drama on the money, because you didn't have to pay for anything other than the film stock and the processing, and you paid actors £6.50 a day. But it meant many people didn't feel able to share because it was a duty to spend the money on themselves. Very rarely will you find people from the School who have actually made films as a team. Jenni Howarth and Jenny Wilkes, who was also in our year, made *They Call Me Pussy Dynamite* together—but it was very rare for people to club together like that.'

Such criticisms apart, Parsons, like her colleagues, is very aware of the benefits of having attended the Film School in terms of building confidence, making contacts and, on graduation, the precious guarantee of a union ticket. 'Going out on shoots was absolutely fantastic. You got the most extraordinary experience of coping with locations. In that time I lit churches, and hospitals; and dusks, and rainbows, everything you might come across. By the time I left Film School I felt absolute confidence that I could light anything, handle any sort of location and studio work, and that although I lacked professional experience, I could take any work that was offered to me. As a



Jane Balfour; *India Cabaret*.

woman one was going to have a lot of other problems and I really didn't need confidence problems on the technical side, so from that point of view Film School was brilliant.'

Though she was never a student there, the NFTS also had a great impact on Jane Balfour's career. Veteran organiser with both the London and Edinburgh Film Festivals, she sometimes helped the School organise its BAFTA graduation screenings. When Karol Kulik, the School's librarian at the time, asked her if she knew anyone interested in a job with sales agent Mari Hoy of Cori Films, Balfour decided to go for it herself. Three years later she set up on her own.

I was very interested in documentaries. When I was at Cori I handled a lot of independent American documentaries and I wanted to carry on with that, but I do drama I like as well. When I first started I talked to Channel 4, which had just started, and persuaded them to let me handle *Broadside* and *20/20 Vision*; and now we're one of their approved distributors.

I handle all kinds of work, it's a very varied catalogue. I was asked to Florence because quite a lot of films in my catalogue happen to be by women

directors. I don't know why, there's no policy decision as such—or whether women come to me as an agent because it's another woman. Also I think maybe I tend, without realising it, to like films made by women. There's probably just an element I respond to; there's a very human element and a kind of delicate feel to many women's films.'

For Balfour, as for all those who graduated from the NFTS around this time, the coincidental advent of Channel 4 was a key factor in getting her career up and running. And for Lezli-An Barrett, the only one of the seven with no Film School connection—and whose career has been a model of persistence and ingenuity—it was crucial. In her case, the breakthrough came with the purchase by Alan Fountain of her first film, *An Epic Poem*; the Channel also provided initial support for *Business As Usual*. Like the others, she's now clearly established among the new wave of women encouraged and nurtured by the Channel, all of whom are now moving on to more ambitious projects.

But while none of them is in the least given to feeling hard done by, it's clear from their experience that women filmmakers still tend to get corralled into a

Lezli-An Barrett; *An Epic Poem*.





Conny Templeman; *Nanou*.

neat little enclosure marked 'women's subjects'. 'I suspect,' Barrett muses, 'having spoken briefly to Conny and Noella, that what the syndrome tends to be is that no way would a producer—it would never enter his or her head—send a woman director a gangster script, or any other kind of genre, unless it's very much about a woman. But if it's about a pubescent young woman discovering her sexuality, and her mother is having a breakdown, and it's all women, then they'd think, well maybe we should get a woman director in on that.'

'Everyone presumes you're going to take a particular perspective with you as a director. A lot of women in documentaries only get offered things which are about children, or gynaecology, or health subjects—rather than, perhaps, science or technology. It's just a suspicion, but I think women are being confined to certain material.'

Templeman, currently writing her next screenplay, also feels there's a tendency to regard women's work in a fairly narrow way. In particular, she believes that if one woman film-maker has touched on a particular genre or

subject within recent memory, that tends somehow to rule it out for any other woman for years to come. 'I'm working on a script that has an English tramp in it, and I sent it to the NFDF and to Channel 4. And both responses were, "Well, there's *Vagabonde* by Agnès Varda, so there's a film that's been done about tramps." Yet how many buddy movies, how many road movies have there been? What would have happened if after the first Western they'd said, oh, we've done one of those? That I find irksome. They can say lousy idea—I don't mind that, that's honesty—but the other is crass.'

Such restrictive attitudes, perhaps, are inevitable so long as women filmmakers remain rare enough within the industry to be regarded as something, if not bizarre, then at least abnormal—women first, film-makers only second. Certainly at the time this particular group started out, there were few enough women of the previous generation to set precedents for them. (Such examples as can be found mostly date back to the 50s: Wendy Toye, Jill Craigie, Betty and Muriel Box, Diana Morgan, Carmen Dillon.) Still, it's encouraging that every one of these seven women agrees that discriminatory behaviour is on the decrease. If they themselves lacked immediate role models, it seems a fair bet—given their unmistakable talent, resilience and determination—that their successors won't.

LIVES of the FILM SCHOLARS

► p. 178 Erwin Panofsky began his 1934 essay 'Style and Medium in the Motion Picture' by noting that: 'Film art is the only art the development of which men now living have witnessed from the very beginnings.' But for all this proximity, it is sobering—especially in the company of the new early cinema historians—to realise just how little we know about these beginnings (and how much of what we think we know is wrong). And in the cases of individual makers and works, the standard of what has been achieved so far—compared to the depth and quality of some literary and visual arts studies—seems roughly equivalent to Vasari's sixteenth-century rough and ready *Lives of the Painters*.

Hence the importance, I think, of the myriad micro-studies currently emerging from American scholars and of their obvious delight at tapping new sources. It's easy from a European viewpoint to mock such punctilious industry and regard it as scholastic or over-solem: but it is producing new knowledge and understanding at a phenomenal rate, and testifies to an intellectual vigour and sheer enthusiasm that seems sadly lacking in Britain. Perhaps it was the emigration to NYU of British-born Antonia Lant that prompted her unravelling of the fascinating knot of con-

troversial issues bound up in Launder and Gilliat's *I See a Dark Stranger* (1946). Under the title 'Representing Ireland: Relations of Gender and Nationality in World War II British Film', she showed how ideology is here explored in terms of sexuality—a striking reminder of how much British cinema still needs new critical perspectives.

And in the same 'Gender and Nationality' panel, Ella Shohat (also NYU and author of an impressive new book about Israeli cinema) explored the intertwining of gender and ethnicity in 'Gender Metaphors: Hollywood's Colonial Imagery', probing familiar assumptions about what is 'natural' in Hollywood representation. Shohat's work has an ethnographic dimension, as has the fascinating investigation by Hamid Naficy (UCLA) of the theological and social implications of cinema's introduction into Iran. Here, it seemed, were the contours of a new anthropology of cinema emerging from the interstices of cultural difference which are such a feature of the American academic scene.

And what about films themselves? An equipment supplier had joined forces with Voyager, publishers of superb interactive video disks, to present for the conference a demonstration entitled 'the classroom of the future', which we gathered would certainly not use messy old film. No doubt this will be the future for some, but for others, celluloid and its conservation remains vital—indeed

ever more so as the boundaries of cinema scholarship are rolled back.

It was appropriate therefore that the SCS launched the proceedings with a special presentation of Eastman House restorations introduced by the curator Jan-Christopher Horak (also a panelist). Frank Baum himself commissioned *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in 1910 to show on his lecture tours and it startlingly anticipates many visual motifs of Fleming's *Wizard of Oz* while also reproducing features of the original stage version. Similarly poised between eras was a magnificent 1928 tinted version of Fejos' *Lonesome*, with two experimental dialogue sequences. Certainly, as Horak noted, these broke the coherent spell of the original silent film, but they also take us back to a crucial moment of historical discontinuity which has its own poignancy and resonance.

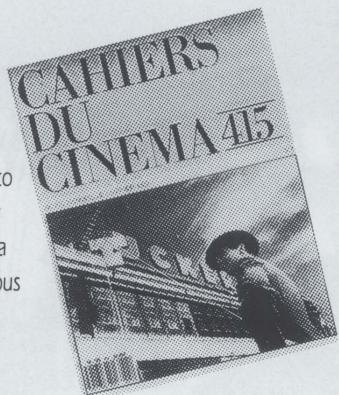
Back at Minneapolis Airport, en route for San Francisco and the 'real' world, another timely aphorism from the conference programme swam into focus, Guy Debord's Situationist credo: 'The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.' Wouldn't the erotic semiotics of David Lodge's *Small World* translate perfectly to the world of screen scholarship? Now who could we cast as in 'Small Screen World' as Morris Zapp, the jet-set prof, and who as Persse, the romantic ingenue...?

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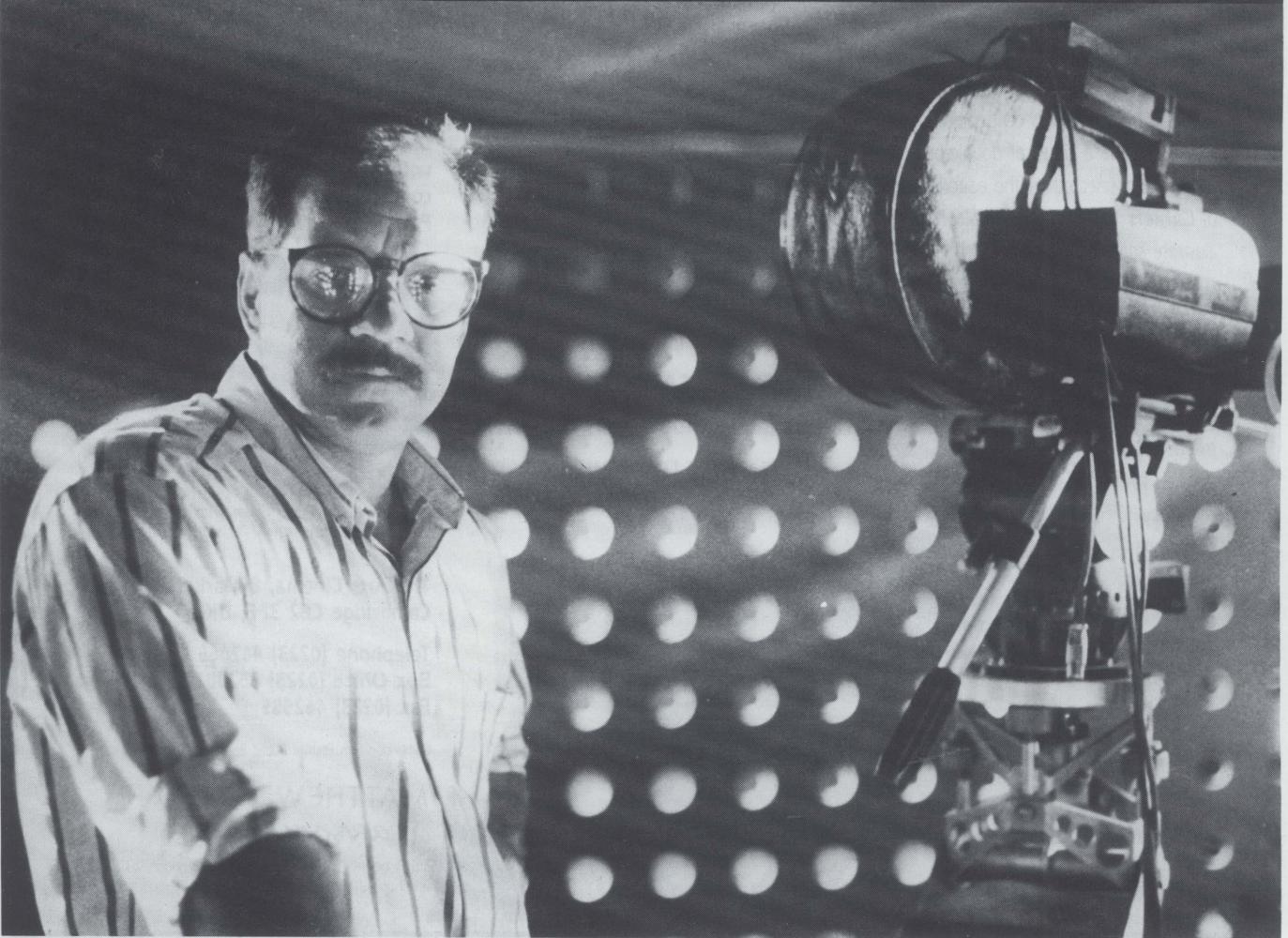
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RICHARD COMBS

PATTY HEARST
— & —
PAUL SCHRADER

A LIFE AND A CAREER IN 14 STATIONS



I. 'What I remember most clearly about those years is my parents' strictness. There were long lists of things we had to do and an equally long list of things we were not allowed to do.'—PATTY HEARST, *Every Secret Thing*.

For so perverse and individualistic a film-maker, one of the wild men of New Hollywood, Paul Schrader seems set on cornering one of the notoriously staid areas of cinema: the bio-pic. As a director, he has so far made only two, *Mishima* and *Patty Hearst*, but he has scripted lives of Christ, Jake La Motta and (as yet unfilmed) George Gershwin for Martin Scorsese, and mooted projects of his own include St Paul and Hank Williams. Schrader even invokes biographies he hasn't considered filming to demonstrate his dramatic method, the character compulsions that dictate everything else in his films, especially their political attitudes: 'Aesthetically, you know, Che Guevara's life is no more interesting than Rommel's life. You could make a great rich story about either one of them' (*Cineaste*, Winter 1977/78).

Given that *Mishima* is probably his most perverse and individualistic film to date, and *Patty Hearst* his most successful, biography does look like Schrader's métier. His films are most alive when working their way into and then working their way out of a life, immersion and transcendence being the vital mechanism. A powerful, dynamic sense of that life doesn't necessarily make for a convincingly dramatised film, however, since everything not integral to the mechanism—narrative connections, thematic parallels, other characters—can look rather perfunctory and schematic, part of an intellectual rationale. The more centralised in one character, the better the film, something Schrader has acknowledged in talking of his growth in confidence from *Blue Collar*, with its tripartite protagonist ('It was a socially outward film . . . It had a lot of protective elements, caper comedy, etc') to the single protagonist of later films. It's evident as well in the switch from the fictional heroes of, say, *Hardcore* and *American Gigolo*, intellectual constructs of spiritual crisis, to the real ones of *Mishima* and *Patty Hearst*.

Real or not, however, one wouldn't have thought that the subject of *Patty Hearst* was one that could stand the Schrader treatment. It looks exactly the opposite of the kind of self-dramatising life that he needs. The crystallising event in Yukio Mishima's life was his seizure of Eastern Army Headquarters in Tokyo in 1970, to deliver his final *cri de coeur* to the Japanese people before committing seppuku. The parallel event in that of Patricia Campbell Hearst, nineteen-year-old granddaughter to the magnate and legend William Randolph, was her seizure by members of the extreme left-wing group, the Symbionese Liberation Army, on 4 February 1974, her fifty-seven days spent blind-

folded in a closet being subjected to abuse, revolutionary invective and indoctrination, her absorption in the SLA, arrest by the FBI, and then further imprisonment.

So passive and unformed is this life that Schrader has called his heroine unconventional by comparison with the hero of *The Last Temptation of Christ* ('a "doer" who changes people's lives'). The curious thing, though, about Patty Hearst's life before her kidnapping (as depicted in her autobiography, in part to counter any suggestion of the spoiled little rich girl) is its catalogue of little abnegations and confinements—the parental prohibitions, the Dominican prep school, the engagement at Berkeley to the arrogant and domineering Steven Weed—a rehearsal for the larger self-abnegation, the harsher confinement to come. And in this way what seems the most non-Schrader of lives does chime with his own strict Calvinist upbringing, the prohibition on movie-going in particular, which he transcended into a career in cinema.

2. 'For all the air circulating in there, I might as well have been in an underground coffin . . . I felt caged, like a wild animal, so helpless.'

If the life Schrader is working his way into and out of here is in many respects his own, this would explain why it might also seem like no life at all, or any life—a picture of the terrors of non-being, of the struggle for personality, individuality, particularity, under the coercive bombardment of Catholicism, Calvinism or political extremism. The irony of Patty Hearst's 'special' background is that, on the eve of her kidnapping, she is a *tabula rasa*, a character who has yet to be—at least as Schrader presents her—and thus an ideal representation for how a self may be taken over and made something not its own. Before the credits, she is introduced on the Berkeley campus, just one of the crowd, while Natasha Richardson's voice-over quotes some of her rudiments of self-knowledge from *Every Secret Thing*: 'I enjoyed a perfectly normal, happy childhood . . . I knew best what was right or wrong for me . . . I knew, or at least I thought I knew, who I was.'

Even that much is then brutally denied by the sequence of the kidnapping, intercut with nightmare flashes of being buried alive, before Patty's real nightmare begins in the closet, a primordial darkness relieved only when one or other of her captors—themselves merely silhouetted slivers of the darkness, filmed at expressionistically tilted angles—opens the door to abuse her for her 'capitalist pig' background or with threats of what will happen if her father doesn't meet their ransom demands.

Reduced to a state of non-being, she becomes the 'underground woman'—Dostoevsky having been invoked by Schrader in connection with the hero of *Taxi Driver*, whose frozen state and alienated employment he has

summarised as 'The film is about a car as the symbol of urban loneliness, a metal coffin.' Travis Bickle eventually finds release in violence that may be as much fantasised as real; for Patty, too, survival becomes a matter of simulated action, accepting that she must join the SLA or die and participating in their bank raids. That her simulation seems even more passive, more a 'false' solution to her identity problem than Travis', may have something to do with the fact that she is a woman. She is Schrader's first female protagonist—unless one counts Nastassja Kinski in *Cat People*, who begins the film as literally a virginal character, and must be caged at the end when her sexual nature is realised.

3. 'In the course of my re-education I learned a good deal about prisons, their [the SLA's] favourite subject . . . The more they talked to me of prisons, the more I became convinced that that was where they belonged.'

Identifying with a woman, perhaps, has freed Schrader from the awkward, half-autobiographical, narcissistic involvement with his male protagonists—she is so completely 'other' (yet in the restriction of her Catholic girlhood, so much him) that he can explore more completely through her the terrors of non-being, of confusion, loss or reversal of self, shut into one's darkness by even more frightening others.

But prison is a 'two-faced metaphor', as Schrader has observed in writing of Bresson: 'His characters are both escaping from a prison of one sort and surrendering to a prison of another' (*Transcendental Style in the Cinema*). They escape the prison of the body and its sins and become 'a prisoner of the Lord'. In Schrader's films, the religious impulse remains though its content has been replaced by secular existential worries; religious guilt persists, however, and a self-mortifying need for prisons. In *Cat People*, Schrader is both John Heard's zoo-keeper and Kinski's 'other', a combination of the animal and the divine, who must be caged, and the 'they' Patty believes belong in prison are, in Schrader's film, also herself. One incidental revelation of her book is that her 're-education' by the SLA allowed her to see through the male chauvinism of Steven Weed; although they were engaged to be married when she was kidnapped, he doesn't reappear in her account after her release.

4. 'In time, although I was hardly aware of it, they turned me around completely, or almost completely . . . We lived in a world of our own, never going outside our safehouse in Hunters Point. Reality for them was different from all that I had known before, and their reality by this time had become my reality.'

Without making the two-faced prison metaphor as concrete as *Cat People* or

Patty Hearst, previous Schrader films have dramatised that split—between the self that longs to escape from its prison, as the soul in Bresson's films must escape from the body, and the self that needs to imprison, out of guilt or fear, or the perception of some other freedom to be gained in the 'cell'. In *Hardcore*, the director's identification figure is both George C. Scott's Calvinist father, from Schrader's home town of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the daughter who has run away to Hollywood. He pursues and tries to reclaim her by becoming, or simulating, something he loathes: 'He begins to finance and cast a pornographic movie. That's a very attractive sort of fantasy' (*Focus on Film*, August 1979). The trouble with this and other similar Schrader scenarios is that they work out the split as a dramatic problem while leaving the existential, or buried religious dilemma untouched. And that may stem from the split between the interests Schrader had as a critic, the static, contemplative films of Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer, and the action scenarios he has turned out as a writer-director: 'My thinking about films is schizoid. There's a big fork in the road where criticism was essentially sacred and screenwriting profane. I am looking forward to the time when I can bring them back together' (*Film Comment*, March/April 1976).

Unification may have come with a new degree of objectivity, since Schrader began filming screenplays by others—*Cat People* (Alan Ormsby) and *Patty Hearst* (Nicholas Kazan)—or where he was collaborating in an alien environment (*Mishima*). Perhaps the director has begun to function as a critic again, interpreting the work of others;

the films become more static and contemplative, and the director and his own demons both more distanced and more clearly presented. On *Cat People*, 'costumer Daniel Paredes outfitted [John] Heard in pleated pants and pastel shirts that might easily have been snatched from Schrader's closet' (*American Film*, April 1982), and in *Patty Hearst*, the simulacrum Heard and the alien Kinski become one in the Schrader-and-not-Schrader of Patty.

Patty Hearst is Schrader's most fascinating, most religious and secular, picture of the making and unmaking of the self, of the struggle of the new self/soul to be born and find its right form/prison. For a while, the primordial darkness of Patty's closet/coffin is even intensified by her impression that her captors are made, ethnically or religiously, of the same darkness. 'You scared of black?' snarls one as she is bundled into her tiny prison. When their leader, 'Field Marshal' Cinque, later introduces himself as 'Cin', she asks, 'Like the Devil?' But her feeling that her captors are all black revolutionaries proves to be an illusion, one fostered by the SLA themselves, who believe that only with this Third World (other world) leadership can the revolution succeed. At which point the expressionist first part of the film, Patty's nightmare of non-being, gives way to a kind of comedy of disguise and semi-being: one of the group, Teko, is so anxious to be black that he dresses up and does jive talk routines into a mirror; another was an actress ('she did *Hedda Gabler*') and is now the group's wardrobe and make-up mistress. From being the overwhelmed subjective focus of the film, Patty becomes a splinter,

one of the group, her presence often only asserted in the occasional voice-over, which attests to her bodily suffering—'I say nothing... I am happy to have headaches, happy to be constipated, happy to be accepted'—in becoming part of this new, make-believe reality.

5. 'By this time I entertained no thoughts whatever about my future. I thought of myself as a soldier in the SLA. I had joined and agreed to their recruitment and thereby had given up all of my past life.'

From her barely formed self prior to the kidnapping, to an acquired one as a soldier of the SLA, where was Patty to go next? In the Schrader scheme, it can only be a transcendence—and back to prison, the monastic cell which gives her the freedom to liberate herself from within. This is what happens to the hero of *American Gigolo* at the end, but here of course it also fits the facts of the real-life case. After nearly two years as prisoner, trainee, then active member of the SLA, Patty was arrested, tried for her part in one of the group's bank raids (where she was famously photographed, glassy-eyed, gun-toting) and sentenced to seven years.

The controversy that surrounded her trial, and led to President Carter eventually commuting her sentence, centred on her 'real' state of mind in all this. Was she a willing participant or was she a brainwashed dupe or was she merely pretending? Schrader is not really interested in that question, or rather he outflanks the either/or formulation: 'It's a mystery, a genuine conundrum, and I had to realise that the answer to it was "yes" and "no" all the time' (*The Listener*, 8 December, 1988). Patty's real state of mind was what she found it necessary or possible to be at any given moment, how she dealt with pressures which Schrader has elsewhere defined (*Focus on Film*, August 1979) as the conflict of all his protagonists: 'The two sides of mankind, the inner and outer selves. The id and the ego. The primal urge and society.'

6. 'But only they, the SLA, had dared to take action to start the revolution which they were certain would triumph some day in the United States... The revolution was their religion and they were fanatics.'

The switch from Patty's interior nightmare in the first half of the film, to the absurdist comedy of her 'revolutionary' activity in the second, hardly suggests an overview of the left-wing politics, the radical movements, of the late 60s and the 70s. None the less, the film has drawn fire as being reactionary, and Schrader has worried over the implications of taking the side of a daughter of the privileged classes, and showing her captors—whose initial ransom demand is for a massive food distribution programme for the poor in California—to

A metal coffin: Martin Scorsese, Robert De Niro in *Taxi Driver*.



be unhinged, narcissistic, dangerous buffoons ('I felt bad about becoming the Norman Podheretz of directors'). One argument against that, which Schrader makes, is that the SLA did not represent in any coherent, responsible way those radical movements, and in fact were often denounced by them. As represented in the film, the SLA is a psychotic splinter, locked into delusions like the 'army' they call themselves and the 'people' in whose name they claim to be acting.

But to say that the film makes fun of them is not quite right. In many ways, they collectively represent a truer Schrader protagonist (like, say, Mishima) than Patty, and as always he is rigorous about following the craziness of his protagonists to its logical end. The problems they face, of how to realise themselves, to transform 'reality'—the inner and outer selves . . . the primal urge and society—are also like those imposed on or discovered by their prisoner in her primal closet. What makes *Patty Hearst* such a clear advance on Schrader's other films which have dramatised this dilemma through a conventional story is that here it can be simply, doubly represented—interior and exterior, subjective and objective—through Patty and the SLA respectively. And, as always, the political is infused with the religious, the problem of how one changes the world caught up with the problem of how one redeems oneself. Which gives *Patty Hearst* an interesting relationship to *The Last Temptation of Christ*, both being about uncertain, unformed adolescents who gain a symbolic, self-destructive prominence in the pushmi-pullyu of political factions.

7. 'Death stalked the foul air in that safehouse. More than ever before, all of them talked of death . . . The only way the SLA could ultimately prove to the people that it meant what it said was by dying for the cause.'

As the religious infuses the political, so martyrdom comes along with it. More than that, suicide as the ultimate transformation, the final solution to the dichotomies that haunt Schrader's characters. In a religious context, this itself becomes a dilemma: 'Intertwined with the abjuration of the body in Bresson's films is the vexing problem of suicide: if the body enslaves the soul, why not destroy the body and be free?' (*Transcendental Style in the Cinema*). In the context of Schrader's secular subjects, it becomes a different option, or possibility of transformation. It's not exactly chosen by Patty, though the film becomes a catalogue of the abjuration of her body, beginning with 'sensory deprivation' in the closet and her fears that her body is giving up, through the guerrilla game-playing of the SLA when they accept her as a recruit ('I'm always dead,' she complains in these mock shoot-outs), to her more horrified perception ('They think I'm dead. I am dead') when the authorities wipe out the

SLA in Los Angeles while she and two other members happen to be away from the safehouse. Yukio Mishima, who struggles with the dichotomy between 'words, which could change the world, and the world which has nothing to do with words', decides that the only way to resolve the stalemate and reach a higher plane of reality is by self-destructing, taking with him the heroes of the three Mishima novels which the film has simultaneously dramatised.

8. 'When the plans were set, we practised over and over exactly how each of us would enter the bank and what we had to do once inside. We rehearsed it as if it were a play opening on Broadway. The whole operation was blocked and timed.'

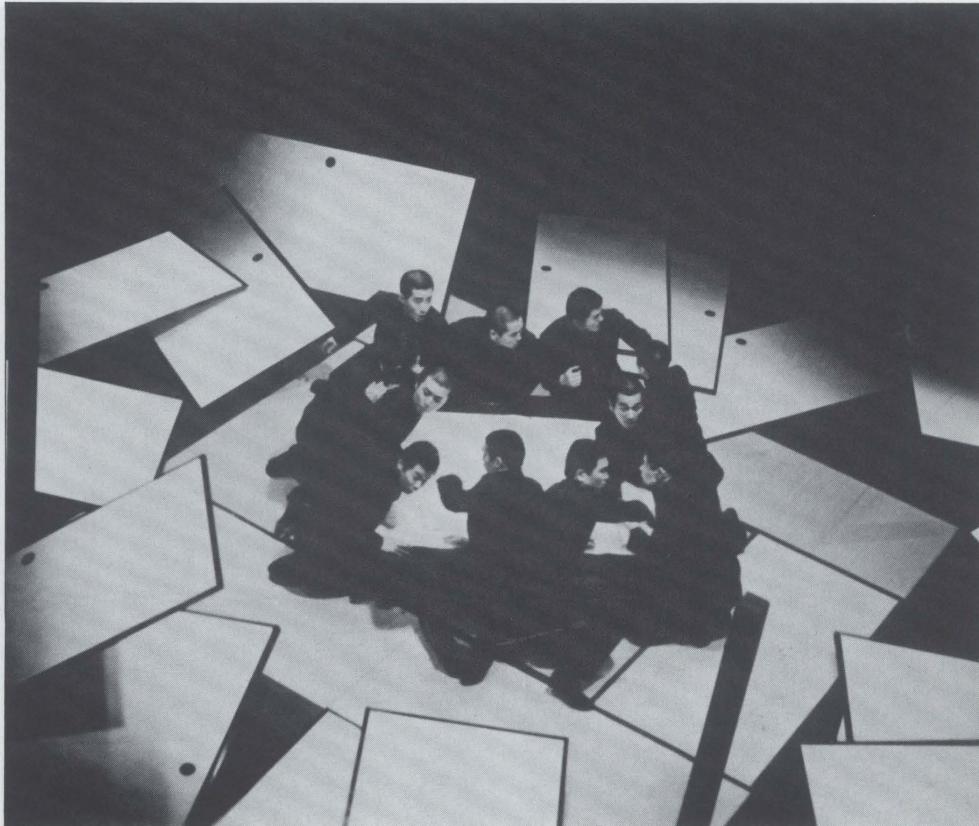
Part of the comedy of *Patty Hearst* is the way the revolution is grimly rehearsed, the SLA stalking each other through the bleak, pared-down rooms of one 'safehouse' or another, playing bang! you're dead! children's games. In *Every Secret Thing*, their captive recalls how they showed little interest in the theory or philosophy of revolution, but conducted constant military drills. They were political theatre waiting to happen on a real stage, the first here being their raid on the Hibernia Bank in San Francisco in April 1974 (the raid which implicated Patty). Schrader films this from a high angle, using stop motion to give it all a clockwork, strictly choreographed look. Patty's theatre will become the courtroom where she must argue about her part in all this—was she acting when she was with the SLA; is she acting now? —Schrader's camera creeping up on the

conclaves of lawyers in a way that makes the settings seem theatrically flimsy, like the tableaux from the novels staged in *Mishima*.

Of the hero of that film, Schrader clearly believes that his political agitations were a way of acting out personal, artistic obsessions: 'There was a sort of vacuum in the right wing, and he moved into it. But he had no real politics . . . It was the stage on which he chose to enact this drama' (*Stills*, June/July 1985). More than this, the need for control and strict planning allied to personal repression, which Schrader identifies in both Japanese culture and his own Calvinist background, says a lot about the way his films work. He dramatises the plight of heroes (once a heroine) who have trouble becoming real to themselves, who construct scripts that will remove the blocks between them and the real world, will cast them in a real role, transforming themselves and perhaps (solipsism becoming politics) the world as well. But the scripting perpetuates the blocks, and Schrader's intellectually pre-determined technique exemplifies both: 'I couldn't write comedy, but I can write comic relief. I couldn't write sexually, but I can write sexual relief. I can't really do the thing itself, but I can do the mask of the thing' (*ibid*).

9. 'Later they wanted me to go with them to see *Citizen Kane*, the Orson Welles movie based upon the life of my grandfather. I absolutely refused. "Ask me to do anything, ask me to rob a bank with you," I pleaded. "But don't ask me to go to a movie theater and get arrested watching *Citizen Kane*".'

Mishima: blocking and timing a political drama.



The fabled background of Patty Hearst's life, of which *Citizen Kane* was one fabulous reflection, is only briefly evident in Schrader's film. Shots of San Simeon back the opening titles, and the drama to come is effectively 'ghosted in' by a susurration of whispered voices, including Patty's. 'Mom, dad... Who are you? . . . I am not being starved or beaten . . .' These Gothic touches are capitalised on in the claustrophobic confusion of the kidnapping, and the initially hellish presentation of the SLA. But these are not Wellesian touches, nor is Schrader's cinema ever really expressionist (there's more theatrical agit-prop in the black phantoms who bombard Patty with slogans). This is surprising, given that the existential angst of Schrader's characters would seem to demand such expression. But in film style as in other matters, Schrader gives us the mask of the thing, not the thing itself. There's often a baffled quality to his films, which drive their characters to a crisis of faith or identity, but then treat it in terms of a rather schematic, studiously blocked and timed action scenario. Which is a factor again of his attempt to combine the quiet contemplation of interior mysteries beloved of a religious critic with the thrill-hungry movies of a secular director.

The blankness of his films might be a trace of that Calvinism that kept him away from cinema until his late teens, or even of the Calvinist tradition which developed no aesthetic of visual art, and had no need of one of personal, humanist expression. Often Schrader has described interesting 'filmic' ideas in interview—such as the two worlds of *Hardcore* defined by Renoir landscapes

in rural Michigan and Antonioni ones (trees painted red and all) for misbegotten Los Angeles—which don't come through on screen. *Patty Hearst* finds its strength in, as it were, a static action scenario: the parallel between the frozen state of Patty Hearst and the impotent one of the SLA. If one looked for a filmic portfolio for that, it might be Samuel Fuller (crime reporter pungency) combined with Joseph Losey (*Living Newspaper theatre*). If *Patty Hearst* resembles any other film, it is *The Assassination of Trotsky*, with its siege mentality and its preoccupation with the problem of converting that into a secure sense of self and a possibility of political change.

10. 'As the flashbulbs went off in my face, I remembered the press pictures of Susan Saxe, a revolutionary who had recently been arrested, and, like her, I smiled broadly and raised a clenched fist in salute. This is how I'm supposed to act now, I thought. Those pictures would show me being taken off to a fascist concentration camp, like a true revolutionary. I had a role to play and I knew my part well.'

Perhaps the strangest chapter, and psychologically the most interesting, in the Patty Hearst saga was the twilight period immediately after her arrest and before her trial, when she was freed from the control of the SLA but continued to behave as if she were one of them. It was this behaviour that made it hardest to prove in court that she had not been a fully fledged urban terrorist. In *Every Secret Thing*, it is explained through the testimony about 'thought

reform and coercive persuasion' offered by defence psychologists: 'One does not revert back with the snap of the fingers upon being released. Dr Lifton explained that many of the released POWs in Korea "spouted Communist gunk" for a full two weeks after being freed, until it finally dawned on them that the coercive pressure was off.' Schrader includes none of this testimony; in fact, for a film-maker preoccupied with inner struggle, he deals remarkably little in psychology. It is back to masks again, and there is no way, and perhaps no need, to explain them; all that can be done is to break through them to some other reality of the self or the soul. Near the beginning of *Mishima*, its hero is shown in a quick montage wearing all his actual masks as soldier, aesthete, self-glorifier. Patty wears nothing, but in one scene, when she is asked her occupation by a police clerk after her arrest, Natasha Richardson's face goes through a fine play of wonderment and self-amusement before she answers, 'Urban guerrilla'.

11. 'I thought I wanted to be left alone, to be allowed to curl up, sleep, and wake up to find it had all been a dream. But I was the centre of attention, a curiosity, a spectacle to gaze upon.'

The flashbulbs that go off in Patty's face, marking her conversion from covert person to public spectacle, recall scenes in *Raging Bull*, where flashbulbs go off like terrorist gunfire. In that film, of course, looking and being looked at was a very violent business, linked to Jake La Motta's compulsive jealousy, the instant aggression with which he gazes upon all who gaze upon his wife. From this vicious circle, Jake can only be broken free by being plunged into a prison cell, and forced to 'find' himself when he is at last unseen and unseeing. For a heroine who is La Motta's temperamental opposite, the process is not surprisingly the reverse: Patty begins in darkness and blindness, and by degrees is forced to wake up, to see, and in the full glare of public attention, now inclined to doubt anything she might say about herself, to assert herself.

It's a path fraught, as it were, with illusions. While miserably confined in her closet, Patty is treated to brief flashbacks of happy family scenes, except that in these as well, at different ages, she is blindfolded. When the SLA at last remove her blindfold, having indoctrinated her and renamed her, a burst of light, the sun's flashbulb, accompanies her first sight of her captors, ranked smilingly before her as if for a photo opportunity. She declares, 'You're all so attractive,' which is partly relief at not finding them actually physical monsters, partly dissembling and ingratiating, partly acceptance of her new SLA self (the Revolution is Beautiful), and partly an attempt to rediscover her own attractiveness, the beginning of the self, the life and the family she must now collaborate in with

Patty Hearst (Natasha Richardson), one of the crowd at Berkeley.



the SLA. From this she is wrenched away, imprisoned again, and reborn into her previous family. When they visit her in prison, she collapses in a foetal position in front of her mother and her two sisters who look much alike, and presumably as she used to look. Is this the beginning of the true 'mirror phase' of her development, after the false one of the SLA? Or is it just the inevitable one? In the final scene, visited in prison by her father, Patty is beginning to talk forcefully about changing public opinion, about letting 'people see the real me.' The press, she says, is a tool to be used, and her father remarks that she sounds like her grandfather.

12. . . at the door into the prison the crush was so great that I could not get into the guardhouse. Finally, a prison official reached out into the melee, grabbed my hand, lifted me up, and pulled me over the bodies that were blocking my way. . . It was a wild end and new beginning: I had had to fight my way into prison.'

Schrader hasn't included that wild scene, of Patty's return to her cell in May 1978 after the failure of an appeal to the Supreme Court. But throughout his film, having once known the terror of confinement, Patty comes to prefer it to other terrors. When the SLA first allow her to venture out into the rest of the house, though still blindfolded, and suggest that she can have sex with any member of the group, she asks, like a child, 'May I go to my closet?' And later, when she sees on TV the destruction of the safehouse in Los Angeles, and realises that to the rest of the world she has died along with most of the SLA, she crawls away into the motel bathroom. Patty never embraces her prison the way Richard Gere's gigolo is made to do, with a line from *Pickpocket* to reinforce the point at the end. But there's perhaps a more Bressonian pattern to *Patty Hearst* which, with all its repetitions, its cells leading to cells (the SLA interrogations echoed in the prison psychiatrists' examinations, etc), emphasises that if there's no escape there must be some other kind of deliverance. And the film does end before Patty's sentence is commuted, though the strength, or grace, she finds in her final declaration to her father, 'Fuck them all,' is more Jake La Motta than Robert Bresson.

13. 'I live now on a private, protected street in deceptively calm California, behind locked doors in a Spanish-style house equipped with the best electronic security system available.'

That very first line in *Every Secret Thing* uncannily conjures the mood with which many Schrader films end: a state of transcendence, detachment, a grace which floats rather insecurely perhaps over the unresolved conflicts of

the self. 'Deceptively calm California' recalls deceptively calm New York, through which Travis Bickle glides again in his metal coffin at the end of *Taxi Driver*. 'Locked doors' are another self-imposed prison, and the 'best electronic security system available' is the self that keeps itself under surveillance, the final 'mirror phase' in identity formation, or some terrible intermediate stage. Freedom or purgatory? It is Jake La Motta at the end of *Raging Bull* rehearsing his night-club act in a mirror, surrendering his own struggle as a 'contender' to imitations of Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*. Of all Schrader's films, *Patty Hearst* is the one that ends least in that mood, because its heroine is still struggling, although the comparison with her grandfather points the way to a similar kind of ambivalent closure. Turning the ambivalence into irony are the final titles which indicate what happened to some of the participants afterwards: Teko (William Forsythe), the most unstable member of the SLA, Patty's most persistent tormentor, and one of the two surviving members with whom she criss-crossed the country after the death of the rest of the group, served eight years for his crimes and then found himself as a lawyer.

14. 'For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. Ecclesiastes 12:14.'

One reason why the closure must be ambivalent, why transcendence or redemption must always seem an unstable thing, as much a loss as a gain, is that the film itself is just one more

reflection, one more prison. It in turn needs to be transcended, because Schrader's filmic liturgy doesn't have the self-contained logic of Bresson's, whereby characters who freely 'choose' what has been preordained by God set themselves free ('preposterous from the outside; yet from the inside, accepting certain theological givens, it is the natural thing to do': *Transcendental Style in the Cinema*). From the inside, Schrader, the film-maker who didn't grow up with film, doesn't quite trust his medium to deliver the goods—like the Mishima who doesn't trust words to change the world. Hence his statements that both the moral conflicts of *Hardcore* and the indeterminate deliverance of Travis Bickle will have to be decided by audiences later; their final scenes will be played outside the cinemas.

God's truth can't be contained within the film, as in Bresson, but there is always his judgment waiting outside it. Hence the most characteristic Schrader shot: the overhead which picks out Patty Hearst at the very beginning, an anonymous student on the Berkeley campus until the eye of God settles on her. Oddly, like the first sentence of Hearst's book, this may be the one interlude of grace the film offers her. For a moment, the camera airily tracks her through the crowds, as she reflects in voice-over on her life so far, then ends, in freeze frame, with an intimation that she may still be subject to the will of another: 'Of course, there is little one can do to prepare for the unknown.'

All heading quotations from *Every Secret Thing*, by Patricia Campbell Hearst with Alvin Moscow.

Back to masks again. Occupation: 'Urban guerrilla'.



Going With the Wind

· WITH THE ·

HELEN TAYLOR ON A 50TH BIRTHDAY

For many film fans, 1989 is a milestone. Picture books and TV specials are appearing in the United States. Devotees are dusting off their Confederate uniforms and starching their petticoats in readiness for the balls and parties which will commemorate the December 1939 premiere of a movie (winner of eight Academy Awards) which has enjoyed huge success over five decades. For this is the fiftieth anniversary of David Selznick's *Gone With the Wind*.

Much print and airtime have been lavished on *Gone With the Wind* (GWTW), and each decade since 1939 has brought new perspectives to bear on the film. There have been debates about the possibility or desirability of a sequel (critic Barry Norman frequently inveighs against such a plan); controversies (especially after its first release and again in the 1960s) over its representation of blacks and the politics of slavery and Emancipation; and revived interest in its stars, with new biographies of Vivien Leigh, Clark Gable and Evelyn Keyes (Suellen O'Hara).

I have been a fan of GWTW for almost thirty years, though my interest and enthusiasm have periodically waxed and waned. A scholar of Southern literature and film, intrigued by GWTW's success, I decided to try to fathom its secret. It is over three years since I sent a letter to magazines and newspapers asking people with strong views on, and memories of GWTW to write to me: 427 letters and 355 questionnaires later, I still receive mail—either second letters from people who responded to my initial request, or the many who have seen the letter in magazines at the dentist's or hairdresser's.

Only this week I received a cutting from the *Morning Advocate*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, about a Charleston historian who claims at last to have dis-

covered the 'real-life model' for Rhett Butler (a Charleston businessman, George Alfred Trenholm); and Bonnie Ashurst, named by her mother after Rhett's daughter Bonnie Blue Butler, wrote a second time to tell me she had met in California the man (sic), now a film-maker, who played baby Bonnie: 'It was a thrill to meet the person whom I'd been named after—so to speak!'

It seemed I was beginning research at a propitious moment. 1986 saw the fiftieth publication anniversary of the Margaret Mitchell novel, and since then issues which have preoccupied fans since the 1930s have come to a head. In the 1980s, American scholars have turned new attention to this book which was regarded with embarrassment and disdain in the Civil Rights era of the 1960s and early 70s; many critics have argued for its inclusion in American literature courses as a supreme example of the Great American Epic. After decades of refused permission by Margaret Mitchell and her heirs, Southern author Alexandra Ripley has been commissioned to write GWTW Part Two (due for publication in 1990), and the arrival of a film, GWTW-2, can only be a matter of time. A legal battle is being waged in Atlanta, Georgia, over the proposed demolition of the building in which Mitchell wrote the book—an apartment block she called 'The Dump'. GWTW fans and those with an eye for tourism are trying to secure the building as a memorial.

My research shows that GWTW is loved, revered, reread, re-reviewed and treasured in very idiosyncratic ways by a wide range of people of different generations, nationality, class and race; though much less so, I believe, by blacks and Asians than whites, and less by men than women. It is common knowledge that everyone has seen or

heard of GWTW, and is familiar with its main characters, stars, sets, music and single lines ('Tomorrow is another day,' 'Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn,' 'Don't know nothin' 'bout birthin' babies'). Leslie Hardcastle told me that, in the original designs for the Museum of the Moving Image, a prominent feature was the famous red staircase up which Rhett bears Scarlett (in the 'Row and Rape' sequence, as David Selznick dubbed it). The design was eventually scrapped as too costly, but it is significant that this was chosen as the set reckoned to be known to all.

So far, so obvious. I am saying nothing new in recording the universal interest this single book/film has provoked. What I have discovered, however, is the extraordinary variety of satisfaction it has offered individual filmgoers and readers, and the diversity of people's memories of and ideas about this one work.

Today, there is a plethora of commentary on and information about film. But what we do not know, amid all the articles and TV programmes, is as interesting as what we do. We have no clear idea of how people watch, enjoy, share and criticise films in general and individual works in particular. We know little about how differently a viewer sees and evaluates an epic like *Lawrence of Arabia* on an appropriately wide screen in the dark, and on a tiny 21-inch TV screen in a well-lit family sitting-room. It is hard to establish the difference in spectatorship when a viewer has first read the book on which a film is based—let alone the difference in two readings before and after a film version has been seen. Do I recall *War and Peace* as a truly wonderful film because my family saw it on a wet afternoon on holiday, and afterwards walked up the street eating the first, most delicious



Cornish pasties we had ever tasted? And what about serial viewing, and the differences in perception that we have of, say, Rock Hudson in the 1950s and 60s, and Hudson in the late 80s after his death from AIDS?

In the case of GWTW, my correspondence and interviews have uncovered a variety of meanings, associations and interpretations brought to, or taken from this single film. I received letter and questionnaire material from many women and a small number of men who had seen the film at different times in the last fifty years—some at grand movie theatres in the 1930s and 40s, having to walk miles home as the last bus had long gone, some on video; some once only, many dozens (a few, hundreds!) of times; some with a love of the novel and considerable knowledge of the American Civil War, others for whom Margaret Mitchell and Southern history were unknown and irrelevant.

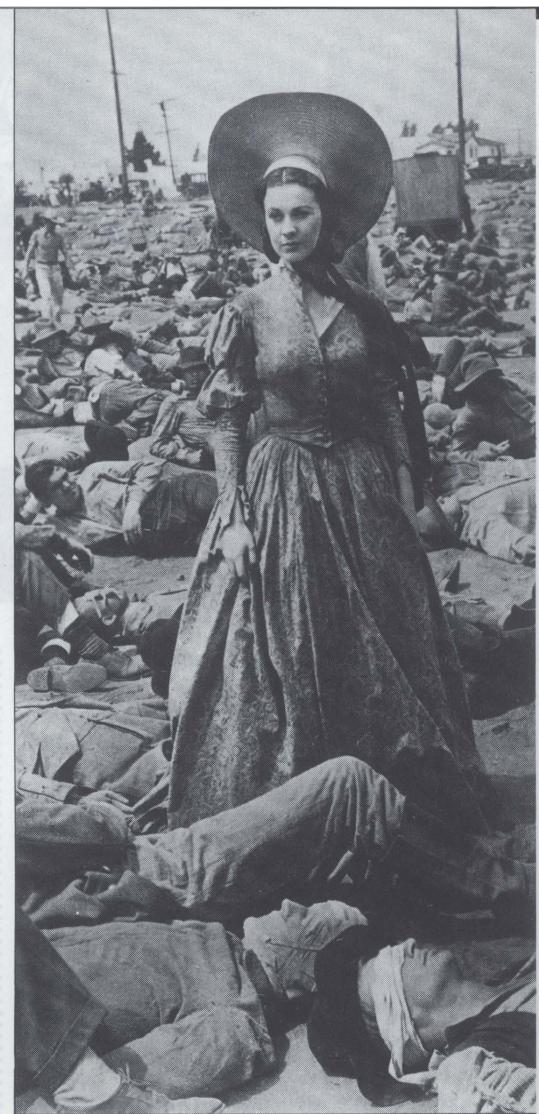
Many of my correspondents had first seen the film during the Second World War (its first London showing was April 1940) and recorded what an extraordinary event it was. Easily the longest film they had seen, with often the most expensive seats which sometimes had to be booked, and with the novelty of an 'intermission' (associated far more with the formal theatre than informal cinema), it boasted some of the most spectacular effects, photography, music and costume ever seen on celluloid. All this at a time of national austerity, Utility clothes and rationing. 'The whole film was such a relief from all the grey days, bombs and so many horrific casualties' (Gladys Millman). Many letters described as the most memorable scene the moment when Scarlett pulls down Tara's green velvet curtains to make a dress; a few viewers followed suit since, unlike dress fabric, curtain material was not rationed.

In those 'grey days', then, GWTW made a particularly strong impact; it was, after all, a story of people enduring the

horrors of a great war. Several women describe the poignancy of watching Atlanta in flames while fearing the cinema over their heads might explode, and a few dived beneath their seats when a doodlebug was heard. Elsie Kingdom, deeply moved by the scenes of Atlanta burning, emerged from the cinema to see the City of London and the docks on fire—the Blitz was underway. Margery Owen told me that filmgoers of the 1930s and 40s expected romantic dramas to end happily, in a clinch. However, several times during the war when she went to see GWTW, each time Melanie told Scarlett that Rhett loves her, and Scarlett ran towards the house to his arms and a certain happy ending, many of the audience cheerfully left to get home before the next air-raid, confident they knew the outcome. As Margery points out, 'During the war there must have been large numbers of people all over the country who saw GWTW and *probably never realised that it did not end happily*'.

Such special memories and associations are of course specific to a generation of women, for whom this war film came very close to home. By later generations, the 'war' theme is rarely discussed; for women who saw the film as teenagers in the 50s, the central love triangle—Scarlett, Rhett, Ashley, but especially the feisty figure of Scarlett herself, seen as failed daughter, mother and lover, fiery feminist, career woman, model for the 'Me' generation—features far more prominently. More recently videotape has spawned a new generation of fans, whose memories are a long way from air-raids and doodlebugs. For instance, Gillian Darward and her college friends read the book and sneaked off to the local 'fleapit' to see the film instead of attending Education lectures. Then: 'With the advent of the video, GWTW afternoons are sheer delight. Food, sherry, hankies in the middle of the floor, silence only broken by eating and crying noises.'

Butterfly McQueen and Vivien Leigh.



No Nightingale.

For women growing up in the 1960s and 70s, Scarlett's trials, tribulations and triumphs were used as models of action in a world which—as after the American Civil War—was making new and different demands on its young women. Of the generation of the 40s and 50s, Molly Haskell, the American Southerner and film critic, wrote: 'Those of us who were ambitious would use our femininity like Scarlett O'Hara used hers: would flirt, tease, withhold sex, to get what we wanted.' For Pat Read GWTW was a revelation because Scarlett was not merely the heroine but 'the prime mover of the story ... mistress of her own fate.' This inspired her, since she had been raised on Hollywood films of the 50s 'in which women were prizes to be fought over and in which they did little but wave misty-eyed farewells to departing warriors, à la June Allyson.'

Pat v.t. West was spurred by Scarlett to make a complete life change. In the early 60s she was training at the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children: 'I was trying to impress both sides of the family by following in the two most admired aunts' footsteps by taking up nursing. I couldn't abide wearing the uniform and couldn't abide the lack of understanding generally extended to hospitalised children. Also, I was terrified of the responsibility most of the time and intimidated by ferocious ward



Model for the 'Me' generation ...

sisters. I saw Scarlett O'Hara enter that barn, take one look at the wounded men—and walk out! That was a real turning point in my life. I realised in an instant that you could walk away from illness and from what everyone expected of you. I guess it was my first real anarchist moment. I promptly threw in the towel and left after 2½ years of misery.'

For younger women, Scarlett is seen as a gritty independent figure—and, judging from responses to my question about whether reader-viewers believed Scarlett would eventually get Rhett back, they see her surviving reasonably happily as a single parent, or rebuilding a satisfactory alternative life. 'Scarlett would take a deep breath, replenish her wardrobe, and find someone or something to fill her life.' Scarlett has a constant longing for the mother, the feminine. Will she—post return to Tara—end her days as a lesbian?

Generational difference also profoundly affected viewers' response to my questions about the representation of black characters and racial issues in the film. While the vast majority admired Hattie McDaniel's portrayal of Mammy, and saw her as extremely

dignified, it was clear that younger women—especially those influenced by post-1960s debates about race and racism—were more sharply critical of the subordinate, blindly loyal, de-sexualised and humorous portrayal of black characters.

Two women who saw the film in the 1940s felt that the black characters were represented fairly. Winefride Welborn saw them as 'held in respect by Mrs O'Hara ... one of the family and, I thought, much better off than when the Yankees came,' while Esme Todd described GWTW as 'the first film I remember in which black people were "real" and not just to be laughed at and scorned' (and, indeed, her view was echoed in the somewhat subdued tone of liberal and black criticism when the film came out, especially after McDaniel's Oscar—the first ever for a black actor).

Feminists often told me how deeply affected they had been by Alice Walker's powerful critique of GWTW, in an essay denouncing a feminist friend for appearing at a women's ball dressed as Scarlett: 'My trouble with Scarlett was always the forced buffoonery of Prissy,

whose strained, slavish voice, as Miz Scarlett pushed her so masterfully up the stairs, I could never get out of my head.' Several wrote to say that, as their awareness of racism had grown, their perspective on GWTW's black characters had shifted, and they now cringed at the waddling, grinning stereotype of Mammy—a part Hattie McDaniel frequently played, twelve times alone in the year of GWTW—and they felt angry at the foolish ineptitude of Prissy. Jacqueline Wilson, a firm fan, took her daughter to see the film and sat in the same row as a small black girl; Jacqueline found herself wondering how this girl must feel watching Prissy and Mammy, and for her it destroyed for ever the magic of the film. One of the film's more bitter legacies is the fact that, unlike Hattie McDaniel, Butterfly McQueen (Prissy) refused to continue playing such a demeaning 'handkerchief head' role, and as a result was boycotted by producers and ceased to work in Hollywood. Certainly, among black critics and my few black correspondents, Prissy is the figure who arouses considerable anger.

So, a great many GWTW enthusiasts have shifted perspective on, or taken generation-specific positions on the film's key issues and characters. Many have also made GWTW their own in a variety of intriguing ways, weaving it into the narrative of their lives. Several—especially in the 1940s—married men who looked like Clark 'Rhett' Gable (see Thaddeus O'Sullivan's delightful film, *The Woman Who Married Clark Gable*, 1985). Pat Read, a severe case of GWTW-itis, has judged all her boyfriends on their ability to sit uncomplainingly through the film. Her first marriage came to grief over it: 'One evening when we were both a little tipsy, he decided to carry me upstairs for a night of grand passion. The effect was slightly marred by the fact that, unlike Clark Gable, he had to pause several times for breath on the way up—and totally ruined by the fact that he cracked my head on the landing wall. We were divorced in 1980.'

Obsession with book and film, and the stars who became so closely identified with it, is fuelled by an enormous and ever-expanding memorabilia, memorial and tourist industry. A great many women have collections, large or small, of GWTW books, cards, posters, jigsaw puzzles, dolls and ornamental plates. Lorie Townsend's loo is decorated throughout with GWTW curtains, cards and a colouring book. At least two plays written by fans have been performed recently by amateur groups: one, *Cynara*, by Suzanne Leonard-Webster, about the writing of GWTW and the phenomenon it became, the other, Penelope Wheelwright's *Gone With the Rest*, an anti-heroine play in which a young addict fantasises she is Scarlett, the heroin is her Ashley Wilkes, the 'wideboy' supplier Rhett Butler. Correspondents wrote describing to me their GWTW family jokes, sayings and mini-dramas. I received many letters with a 'Tara'

Uncredited director George Cukor (above camera), cinematographer Lee Garmes (curtailed).



letterhead, from women whose mothers named them Melanie, and whose dogs and cats are called Rhett and Scarlett.

But, however enthusiastic the British are over GWTW, for Americans this film is enshrined in their culture. Thus the United States GWTW industry is more highly developed than ours, and my more enterprising correspondents have visited Atlanta and resorted to mail-order catalogues to sample some of these riches. From 1936 onwards, there has been GWTW dress material, hats, cologne, wallpaper, parlour games, dolls and cookery books. Grand Granite Enterprises have a catalogue of 'GWTW and Civil War Memorabilia' offering everything from a lifesize Clark Gable model to Scarlett hand-fans. Herb Bridges, a retired postal worker who lives near Atlanta, regularly exhibits and lectures on his 'world's largest' collection of GWTW memorabilia—thousands of items from dozens of countries which spill out of his huge attic.

Tourists by the hundred arrive in Atlanta asking, 'Where is Tara?', only to be disappointed by the lack—as yet—of a Mitchell Museum and Tara reconstruction. The closest some of them get is supper at 'Pittypat's Porch' Southern restaurant, or (for the affluent ones) chez Mrs Betty Talmadge. Mrs Talmadge, Atlanta businesswoman, claims her large, white-columned plantation house, Lovejoy, was Mitchell's model for the Wilkes' home 'Twelve Oaks': 'People, when they go West, look for

cowboys. When they come to Atlanta, they look for Tara, Scarlett and Rhett. I've got the nearest thing to Tara right here.' Betty hosts 'Magnolia Suppers' with the GWTW soundtrack flooding Lovejoy's lawns through loudspeakers and items such as 'Scarlett's Turnips' on the menu. Betty also has more ambitious plans, since she owns the original facade of Selznick's 'Tara', stored in boxes, awaiting a permanent site.

Since the Mitchell Estate has considerably relaxed its earlier constraints on memorials, the pressures and possibilities of tourism may give a new boost to the combination of Atlantan business interests circling round the GWTW honeypot. Betty, Herb and the Mitchell Museum Group are overshadowed by Ted Turner of Cable News Network, who now owns the film and shows it every day of the year at his CNN headquarters, and who perhaps holds the key to a major memorial. Even Andrew Young, black mayor of Atlanta, who shares the very natural ambivalence of his race toward the city's most celebrated book and film, recognised the income-generation potential of a Mitchell Museum, by forbidding immediate demolition of 'The Dump'. The bandwagon looks set to roll on and on.

So *Gone With the Wind* is kept alive in a myriad ways—through private memory, critical reappraisal, endless reproduction in the cinema, on TV and posters, in star biographies, by mail-order memorabilia catalogues and

tourist markers. How the individual filmgoer relates to and thinks of this single work, to which it has long been impossible to come without preconception, depends greatly on his or her generation, race, sex, nationality, film-knowledge. The film of GWTW has been blessed in deriving from a bestselling book, having a producer with brilliant flair in publicity, casting and innovative techniques, and reaching the cinema at just the right time. The two-year 'Search for Scarlett O'Hara', the inspired casting of everyone (except Leslie Howard as Ashley, denounced by virtually every one of my correspondents), its 'open' ending, and its premiere at the end of the Depression and in the first year of World War Two when war, survival and endurance gave it special resonances ... all set it on course for fifty years of worldwide acclaim.

In its first fifty years of life—dramatic years which have cast fresh social and political lights on this nostalgic and, in some ways, deeply reactionary film—GWTW has survived as the supreme achievement and icon of Hollywood's greatest decade. Who knows what new associations and readings it will receive in its second half-century? For, as we all know, tomorrow is ... ■

Helen Taylor is the author of 'Scarlett's Women, *Gone With the Wind* and Its Female Fans', to be published in September by Virago.

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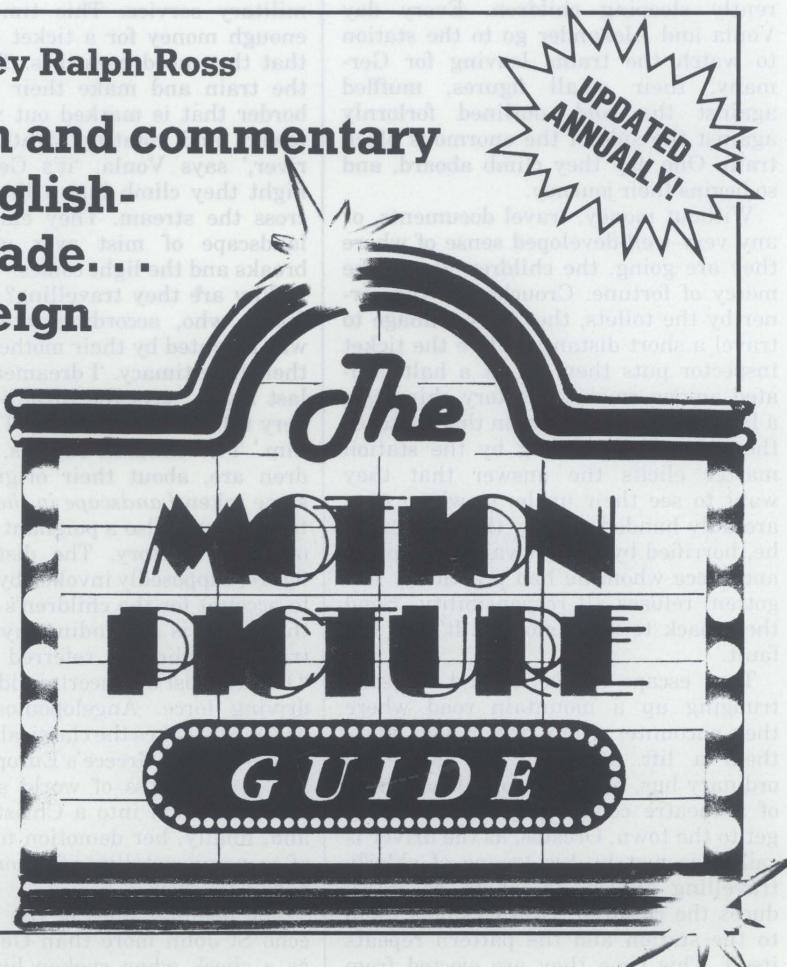
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Tania Palaiologou (Voula), Stratos Tzortzoglou (Orestes), Michalis Zeke (Alexander).

BIBLICAL ODYSSEY LANDSCAPE IN THE MIST

'In the beginning was the darkness . . .' A child's voice tells the story. A second child's voice silences the first, 'It's mother!' A door opens casting a swathe of light across the previously black screen revealing the faces of two apparently sleeping children. Every day Voula and Alexander go to the station to watch the trains leaving for Germany, their small figures, muffled against the cold, outlined forlornly against the side of the enormous black train. One day they climb aboard, and so begins their journey.

Without money, travel documents, or any very well-developed sense of where they are going, the children are at the mercy of fortune. Crouched in the corner by the toilets, they only manage to travel a short distance before the ticket inspector puts them off at a halt situated among smoking factory chimneys, a landscape of desolation that matches their own. Questioning by the station master elicits the answer that they want to see their uncle, to whom they are duly handed over by the police. But he, horrified by the arrival of a nephew and niece whom he had practically forgotten, refuses all responsibility. 'Send them back to their mother. It's all her fault.'

They escape the police and are soon trudging up a mountain road where they encounter a bus driver who offers them a lift. It turns out to be no ordinary bus, but the props department of a theatre company; and when they get to the town, Orestes, as the driver is called, is met by his troupe of elderly travelling players to whom he introduces the children. Orestes takes them to the station and the pattern repeats itself. This time they are ejected from

the train into the pouring rain. A lorry driver takes pity on the two pathetic figures standing by the side of the motorway and gives them a lift, but later, when he pulls in for rest, he notices that Alexander is sleeping and takes the opportunity to rape Voula.

More train, then Salonica where they meet up with Orestes determined to enjoy his last taste of freedom before military service. This time they beg enough money for a ticket only to find that they need passports. They slip off the train and make their way to the border that is marked out with watchtowers and rotating lights. 'Over the river,' says Voula, 'it's Germany.' At night they climb into a little boat and cross the stream. They emerge into a landscape of mist over which dawn breaks and the light comes.

Why are they travelling? To find the father who, according to their uncle, was invented by their mother to explain their illegitimacy. 'I dreamed about him last night,' says the little boy. 'He was very tall.' He was so close I could touch him.' Two children curious, as all children are, about their origins. By the same token *Landscape in the Mist* (Artificial Eye) is also a poignant exploration of Greek history. The distant, exiled figure, supposedly invoked by the mother to account for the children's presence in the world, is a founding myth of Greek tragedy, obliquely referred to through 'Orestes', just as uncertain identity is its driving force. Angelopoulos, however, brilliantly yokes the classical tradition to the process of Greece's Europeanisation, her gradual loss of world significance, her absorption into a Christian empire and, finally, her demotion to the status of economic satellite of a northern (barbarian?) power.

The opening lines of the film, which echo St John more than Genesis, come as a shock when spoken by a child in

the authentic vernacular, as the most complex of texts is delivered by an uncomprehendingly innocent voice. In the same way, the children's conviction that Germany is a land flowing with milk and honey, a place where their primal anxieties will be resolved, a sort of Eden of their fantasies as they stand, for all the world like Adam and Eve, beneath a spreading tree in the last shot of the film, their backs to us not because they are being cast out but because they are going forth to discovery, this same Germany is the land of the barbarians and the invader for all the middle-aged adults in the film. The question posed, as in many of Angelopoulos' previous works, is how to interpret the history of Greece and the film is framed as a nationalist epic whose international appeal fittingly derives from the universal nature of the poetic figures we have inherited from Greek culture.

Many viewers will wish to see *Landscape in the Mist* as a modern *Odyssey*. If so, they will discount the dialectic of innocence and experience on which the film is based, the fact that the child's eye view is used to reveal unpalatable or uncomfortable truths. Its closest precursor is surely *Alice in the Cities*, in which Wenders examines the impact of American culture in Germany and the ways in which a European film-maker can function in a tradition dominated by Hollywood. The poignant fact, however, is that for Angelopoulos Paris represents the artistic metropolis of which Greece is but a provincial outpost, just as Germany represents the hub of its economic activity. And whereas the film's interrogation of history is both moving and comprehensible its artistic affiliations are less convincing.

Much turns on the role of the troupe of travelling players whom the children encounter from time to time on their travels. These actors are presented as elderly and somewhat maniacal, pacing the beach as they rehearse the lines which recount how Greece was invaded by Germany and sold out by the British. Their interpretation of events is no doubt correct and the significance they lend to them appropriate, and yet they remain slightly outside the film, adding a series of picaresque diversions which destroy the stark simplicity of the story. Why does Angelopoulos allow these people, who are obsessional to the point of being irritating, to interrupt or delay the children's quest? Is it because he remains sympathetic to their stance? Or is it that 'real theatre' is somehow held to be the fitting arena for the rehearsals of popular political concerns?

Thus one senses in *Landscape in the Mist* a profound scepticism about modernisation, an admiration for the childlike capacity to take the world as it comes but a greater sympathy for the struggles of an earlier period,

a suggestion that the unknown future, the new dawn, holds promises of which one should beware, and it is ultimately these political hesitations which destroy the rhythm of the narrative, turning our attention beyond the confines of the film itself to that of the film-maker's own position. After Genesis comes Exodus. Will Angelopoulos give us the

film of the Greek diaspora or will he continue, with his travelling players, to chew over the struggles and defeats of the past? The question is posed as one of content but also of style. *Landscape in the Mist* is a European art film, shot in an international style. Is this the destiny of Greece?

JILL FORBES

PAVED WITH GOOD INTENTIONS THE LEGEND OF THE HOLY DRINKER

Ermanno Olmi's *The Legend of the Holy Drinker* (*Artificial Eye*) is a Faust legend with its wires crossed: God takes the place of the devil and none of the women characters adopts the redemptive role of Gretchen. The scene is Paris, a city famous for many things including its tramps, its bridges and its cafés, bistros, wine bars and other drinking places. A tramp, Andreas (Rutger Hauer), sleeping rough under one of the less fashionable bridges, wakes one morning to encounter a mysterious stranger who offers him a loan of two hundred francs, which he agrees to repay the following Sunday to the priest at the Church of Ste Marie de Batignolles where there is a shrine to Saint Teresa of Lisieux.

The money (plus a good dose of further good luck along the way) helps the tramp to rehabilitate himself, but somehow he never manages, on that or any subsequent Sunday, to get to the church with the money. After a final abortive attempt, he is called to his Maker: that is, he collapses in a café in a drunken stupor and is dragged into the sacristy of the church, money in hand, and there he dies. A final title says, 'May God grant us all, all of us drinkers, such a good and easy death.'

The final title comes from the Joseph Roth story from which the film is derived. Roth, a German Jew who died in exile in Paris in 1939, is a writer of limpid surfaces and hidden depths, who is not easy to adapt to the screen. His *Legend of the Holy Drinker* is partly autobiographical—Roth was a heavy drinker himself and was probably at the time contemplating his own impending death. It is also more a fable, in the classic German tradition, than a realistic story. This instantly poses problems for an adaptation. For while the original story invites a reading as an autobiographical work, the film cannot—unless we are to assume that the film-makers are a mere empty 'medium' through whom Roth can talk in the first person to today's audiences, or else that Olmi is a persecuted alcoholic like Roth and the autobiography is therefore his. Furthermore, as a fable, the story has the advantage that its truth does not have to be tested all the time against 'reality'; things can happen which in real life would seem intrinsi-

cally implausible but whose presence in the story is justified at the imaginative level at which the story is set.

By contrast the film version is beset by the effects of a contradictory literalism, striving at the same time for accuracy in reproducing the events of the story and for a truthful rendering of the material existence of tramps, cafés, bridges—what the story is 'about'. The film's portrayal of scenes of everyday life—as when one tramp holds up a mirror for a friend to shave by—is convincing, moving and beautiful. But Olmi (despite what some of his admirers may say) is not Bresson, and the film seems unable to make the transition from the meticulously observed to a level of reality at which the implausible has its own imaginative necessity. The film is painstakingly attentive to detail, but the detail is often off-key. Money is crucial to the narrative, since all depends on whether the hero can return the two hundred francs to the saint. But the film never develops any strong sense of what that sum is worth in spending or earning terms. Two hundred francs is the sum Andreas receives in Roth's story, set in 1939, and this is the sum he gets in the film, which is set in some indefinite postwar time which sometimes looks like today and some-

times more like the late 50s. Olmi and his producers are to be congratulated on not trying to recreate a period Paris to set the film in, but the compromise they have chosen deprives it of the precision it needs at certain key points, and thereby undermines the symbolic structure which gives sense to the plot.

At the same time, however, details can be too precise, as with the suit which Andreas is lent by a former schoolmate, now a successful boxer. The cut of the suit wonderfully evokes a bygone continental style (more Central European than French, but Andreas and his friends are all Polish immigrants) of would-be flash dressing. Somehow, though, it is never quite clear if the suit is old-fashioned only from the standpoint of today, or whether it was already an ancient reach-me-down at the time Andreas puts it on.

The result is a film whose limpid surface may or may not have hidden depths below. Its charm lies in its avoidance of screen stereotypes. Here is a Paris which is not only not Hollywood, but not *nouvelle vague* either. Here is a drunk with none of the swagger of the screen drunk—and an actor playing a drunk with none of the mannerisms of an actor playing a drunk. When Andreas drinks, he just drinks, and when he passes out, he passes out. The ordinariness of the film is its greatest strength. The problem comes when it has to represent the extraordinary, the strokes of luck, the magic coincidences, the wish-fulfilments which briefly transform Andreas' life. And when it seeks to persuade the spectator—without any apparent irony—that there is more to this than meets the eye and that the hand of God must be seen in all these events, one can only wish that Olmi had stuck to Faust and sent his hero to hell.

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH

The Legend of the Holy Drinker: Sophie Segalay, Rutger Hauer.



ARTWORLD

SLAVES OF NEW YORK

In 'The Hustle', the central episode of James Ivory's *Roseland*, a young man (Christopher Walken)—personable, compassionate, and above all understanding—finds himself the object of attention of three purposeful women, each of whom he does his best to satisfy. In *Slaves of New York*, twelve years later, Ivory—though not with his regular scriptwriter Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, but Tama Janowitz, the author of the bestselling collection of stories from which the picture is derived—again explores the subject of willing, and in some ways inexplicable, servitude.

Roseland was chiefly about the old: European exiles dreaming of home in a cavernous magical New York ballroom. *Slaves* (Columbia Tri-Star) is about the young, who have nothing to fear and nothing to remember, but who are nevertheless in their own way dreamers, who inhabit makeshift impermanent lofts and who change partners, it seems, with the ease of taxi-dancers. *Roseland* did not find a wide New York audience, and *Slaves* has not on the whole pleased the city's critics. In both films, Ivory used English cameramen, Ernest Vincze and Tony Pierce-Roberts respectively, and there is in the look of both films something singular and, for a director based for many years in New York, wilfully 'un-American', in the Hollywood sense. There is, too, in both films, a languor to which it is necessary to surrender. Ruth Jhabvala once described an MIP project as one dreamed up, characteristically, in the suffusing heat of the Rajasthan Desert.

The plot of *Slaves* is set in motion by a flea which bites Stash (Adam Coleman Howard), an aggressively self-absorbed artist with the heroic beginnings of a manly beard. The flea, Stash claims, standing at his front door in red Mickey Mouse undershorts, came from Andrew, the pristine dalmatian belonging to his girlfriend Eleanor (Bernadette Peters), a hat designer. Eleanor, an original, is Stash's slave—their apartment belongs to him—and she must therefore accept the ritual abuse heaped on slaves down the ages for misdeeds they did not commit. Andrew, it turns out, will be her one unswervingly loyal friend.

Making liberal use of jaunty optical devices, the film then sets about the breathless interweaving of the lives of a loose group of industrious, fired-up young New York artists and those who favour, but in fact depend on them, the city's patrons and gallery-owners. Eleanor vainly attempts simply 'to make friends' with the compassionate soft-centred writer Mikell, who has hovering at his back the sinister, armourplated 'B'. Stash allows himself to be seduced by the serpentine



Slaves of New York: Bernadette Peters (Eleanor).

man-eating vamp Daria (Madeline Potter, making a meal of a most scornful role). Marley (Nick Corri) relentlessly pursues the reluctant Eleanor with pleas to become the model for his 'Christa', the centrepiece of a grandiose chapel to be built in Rome for which he is seeking a patron. Meanwhile, Sherman (Charles McCaughan), Daria's hobbling slave, is cuckolded by Marley, though, it transpires, all Daria wants of her one-nightstands is a souvenir painting or an introduction to a gallery-owner...

Ivory observes these youthful shenanigans with a notably engaged sympathy. There is little here of the patrician aesthete (as he cast himself in a passing shot in *The Europeans*) silently gazing at a precious objet d'art. He likes these young people, despite their insufferable egocentrism, and he observes their pastimes—club life in 20s Paris had the unquenchable Armelia McQueen, 80s New York has a farouche singer in a bathtub fiercely crunching a celery stick—with genuine, eye-opening fascination. The climactic fashion show, at which Eleanor finds she need no longer be a slave, that her hats have a market and she can at last afford her own apartment, is an extraordinary ear-splitting spectacle: not something, one imagines, easily conceived in the Rajasthan Desert.

When Ivory last set a film in New York—*Jane Austen in Manhattan* (1980)—the world was that of rival theatre groups (again with hovering patrons), but the interweaving was both faster and more elliptical. Here, he relaxes into the milieu, lets it find its own pace, as in a scratch baseball game full of adroit comic asides, or agreeably drift away, as in Eleanor's final, decidedly unwild house-warming party,

at which Tama Janowitz herself, the only other woman present, shyly locks herself in the bathroom.

From beginner to grande dame, Merchant Ivory Productions has for twenty-seven years been consistently fortunate with its actresses: they are, indeed, one of its hallmarks, and not just the stars but the secondary players too, the capable platoons of begums, mothers-in-law, aunties and landladies. Bernadette Peters is something of an exception, neither a beginner nor a grande dame, she has for several years been a reliable comedienne, though one whose coquettishness is, if encouraged, liable to run away with her. Here, decked out with her startling headgear and, at one point, a hairy, flammable coat trailing a foolish tail, she conveys a bruised, weary but never ridiculous resilience which is attractive in itself and gives the picture a down-to-earth centre.

The theme of *Slaves of New York* is, in a sense, the presumption of artists, the gullibility of patrons and the vanity of gallery-owners. Stash carelessly snaps Polaroids of a TV cartoon; a jolly stout patron (cue for a splendid MIP eating scene) has spent a fortune videoing the year-long ordeal of an artist tethered to a dog; and the gallery-owner who mounts Stash's exhibition prissily smooths his hair for a Japanese video team, breaking off an argument with Stash to allow them to reload. But James Ivory also has time for his characters—is their slave—and records their passing, careless, vivid lives with an unalloyed affection; though one cannot imagine his young artists settling down for an evening with Henry James or E. M. Forster, as yet at any rate.

JOHN PYM



Another Woman: Gena Rowlands, Mia Farrow.

MAKING HIS DAY ANOTHER WOMAN

There's a neat handful of possibilities in the title of *Another Woman* (Rank). One is the straightforward intimation of infidelity, a theme which takes off from the sexual self-doubt and romantic waywardness of Woody Allen's comedies to become the major organising principle, *la ronde*, something with serious moral and dramatic consequences, in films like *Hannah and Her Sisters* and *September*. But in this instance, although there is certainly some sexual waywardness among the little cluster of friendships that Allen again takes for his subject, infidelity is more a kind of self-betrayal, a different way of opening up all those self-doubts. The 'other' woman is the nameless patient (Mia Farrow)—eventually to take her name, Hope, from a Gustav Klimt painting—whose sessions with a psychiatrist begin infiltrating, via a ventilation shaft, the apartment of Marion (Gena Rowlands), a philosophy professor who has taken this room in a separate building from her home in order to have peace to write.

Gradually Marion's orderly existence is affected by the despair she hears being poured out on the floor below: 'It was as if a curtain had parted and I could see myself clearly, and I was afraid of what I saw and what I had to look forward to . . .' The older professional woman, without children of her own, but with a life apparently quite well worked out with her second husband Ken (Ian Holm) and his sixteen-year-old daughter, is first alarmed by this insinuating disorder—Hope is pregnant, but afraid she may

have made the wrong choice in her marriage as in other things—then forced to live it out. Once she has heard that voice, it seems Marion has only to turn a street corner—as she does, quite literally, a couple of times—in order to stumble on some hidden continent of resentment and disappointment from family or friends that she never dreamed existed.

Having, as it were, carried out this remote-control *Persona* exchange—the two women meet once, but a relationship doesn't develop—they can both retreat with something learned. In her last conversation, Hope can be heard through the vent telling the psychiatrist about this woman she has met, whose 'cold, cerebral life' has given her some reassurance about the messiness of her own, while Marion has returned to work on her book, confident that she doesn't have to be cold and cerebral any more—or, ambiguously, that at least she has memories to keep her warm.

All of which makes *Another Woman* sound like another neatly concluded episode in Allen's own career therapy, his evolution from funny man to thinker in films which, from *Interiors* to *September* and now this, have been greeted with increasing critical dismay. It's as if, having enjoyed all those early comedies of self-doubt, every niggling fear, inadequacy and phobia generously shared—allowing audiences, in time-honoured fashion, both to empathise with and feel superior to him—we're now being made to suffer the consequences of Allen telling himself, artistically, to pull himself together. The

jokes that once diffused the pain have been eliminated, Allen's own no-hoper personality has been distributed round a select group of serious performers, and the whole thing played out with a stylistic starkness that often looks like movie minimalism flirting with the theatre of middle-class conscience.

But this is not necessarily an aberration on Allen's part, or success tempting him to act out every funny man's dream of becoming a 'serious' artist, abetted in his case by a lifelong admiration, even when spoofing him, for Ingmar Bergman. Films like *September* and *Another Woman*, in fact, may be the only way out of the impasse into which Allen had worked himself with the comedies in which he himself starred as the perpetually self-denigrating, self-abnegating little guy—the inferiority complex writ large enough to consume a whole film. Indeed, in conceits like *Zelig*—the hero who is too embarrassed to exist—Allen has virtually made the film that denies its own existence. Which ties in with the way that his own self-starring vehicles have recently been de-developing, winding down (*Radio Days*) into the gag routines of his earliest movies, almost as if Allen were wishing himself out of film altogether (into a cerebral, self-sufficient realm, like the one created here by Marion?). In *September* and *Another Woman* he has actually come up with something that is a little out-of-film, something like the well-made play, and a different way of embodying his self-doubting neuroses. The 'other' woman, in a further permutation of the title, might not be the mysterious, disembodied Hope but the heroine, Marion—she is the stranger, the self-sufficient intellectual WASP before whom Allen always used to feel so inadequate in his comedies.

Marion, an established professor of philosophy at a women's college, with a mother who doted on Rilke, is a figure who might well have appeared, only slightly more parodied, in the earlier films. Which leads one to suspect that *Another Woman* (or *September*) is not that far removed from the comedies—it's just that the emotional content, the guilts, the inadequacies have been parcelled out differently, mainly because Allen isn't present any more, he really has escaped from the role of being his own worst enemy. That part has, increasingly, been taken in his films by Mia Farrow, which is why her perspective seems central here (her symbolic opposition to Marion, her pregnancy, her hapless openness about her helplessness), even though she's hardly on screen. But other roles have proliferated: in place of the entropic collapsing-in-on-itself comedy of *Zelig*, about immigrant-assimilationist anxieties, Allen now projects identity crises outwards, through several generations (Marion's father, played by John

Houseman, makes a dream visit to the psychiatrist, to complain, like Hope, that he has lived a lie of non-ethnic America.

And even further abroad than that: part of the strangeness of recent Allen is the English actor-per-film (Michael Caine, Denholm Elliott, Holm) he adds to his ensemble, while that ensemble in general becomes more stellar (Gene Hackman and Sandy Dennis also turn up here to do their cameo bit towards opening up the heroine). From having played the pathetic schlemiel who takes the woes of the world upon his shoulders, it seems Allen is now going to force the world to tote its share, and to confess its own inadequacies in agonising little playlets. Those playlets are beginning to look more naturalised, less stiffly Bergmanesque or classically

Chekhovian. In *Another Woman*, Allen finds a way of further personalising the schema by making it about psychoanalysis, which Marion undergoes by proxy, always seeming to fall asleep before she hears the voices from 'down below' (the sleep of reason brings forth monsters of self-scrutiny). Perhaps Allen is now less like Bergman than he is like, say, Clint Eastwood, in the way he makes films to escape the kind of persona he used to have in films. *Another Woman* is an intriguing stage in that evolving cinema, that is still not sure it wants to be cinema. And as another accounting with the kind of people who used to be his persecutors, real or imagined, in his comedies, it must have made its director's day.

RICHARD COMBS

second chance.' The line may be a cliché, but Demme knows his Hitchcock, and is surely aware that it echoes James Stewart's comment to Kim Novak as he forces her up the bell-tower in the final scene of *Vertigo*: 'We don't often get a second chance in life, and I'm going to grab mine while I can.'

Like Stewart in *Vertigo*, Angela is the victim of others' deceptions. Looking for employment as a waitress, she is spied on by a manager as she tries on a uniform; she is photographed by Downey while Tony Russo molests her at her husband's funeral; and later, when she asks Downey for a date, she is monitored by another agent, Benitez. The most significant deception comes when Downey, working under the guise of 'Mike Smith', a friendly neighbourhood plumber, spends the night with her. It places him, for the moment, on a similar footing to Russo, and justifies Angela's accusation that the FBI 'work just like the mob' (the cue for the script's sharpest line, when another agent points out 'One important difference: the mob work for a gang of lying, thieving sons of bitches; we work for the President of the United States').

Unlike Charlie Driggs, who saves Lulu from the clutches of the psychotic Ray, Downey proves his love for Angela outside the context of the main plot. As a decoy for the FBI during the film's climax, Angela earns her own reprieve, which is realised when she returns to work as a hairdresser—an inversion of her first scene in which she is discovered cursing the man styling her hair (played by one of Demme's favourite actors, Charles Napier). This is a neat conclusion to the film's critique of power relationships, almost all of which are seen as corrupt. Angela's

KISS AND SHOOT MARRIED TO THE MOB

Married to the Mob (Rank) takes its feminism more seriously than any of Jonathan Demme's previous films. In his prison cell at the end, Tony 'the Tiger' Russo (Dean Stockwell), the head mobster, is persecuted by a recurring nightmare in which his jealous wife, Connie, fires a pump rifle into his crotch; and in the final scene, Angela De Marco (Michelle Pfeiffer) avenges herself on the FBI agent Mike Downey (Matthew Modine), by playing Delilah and cutting his hair.

In his MFB review of Demme's previous feature, *Something Wild* (1987), Steve Jenkins pointed out that its femme fatale, Lulu Hankel (Melanie Griffith), was evoked 'as a purely functional narrative device, in order to open up' the character of the protagonist, Charlie Driggs. By contrast, Angela De Marco retains her independence from start to finish, and remains at the film's centre throughout. In this respect, the casting of Michelle Pfeiffer was inspired; her playing contains resonances of *The Witches of Eastwick*, where she was also pursued by a satanic, lecherous male in whose downfall she was instrumental.

Demme's natural, streetwise wit has always been a distinctive element of his work, but never has his talent for closely observed satire been so evident. Much of the humour in the opening scenes, for instance, plays on the (apparently true) fact of the Mafia's integration into suburban middle-class life. It opens on a suburban railway platform (echoing Demme's Hitchcockian thriller, *Last Embrace*) where, among the commuters, two gentlemen in suits and ties discuss dinner the previous night. Only gradually do we realise that both are mobsters (one is Angela's husband, Frankie) waiting for the man they are to 'ice' on the train.

Despite the respectability their affluence buys, their criminality is revealed at every turn; everything is dealt with on the same level as the stolen goods that furnish their homes. When Tony Russo discovers that his mistress is also seeing Frankie, he kisses her, then shoots them both.

Frankie's murder gives Angela the incentive to move to New York and begin a 'good life, a life I can really be proud of', reminding one again of *Something Wild* in which Lulu was anxious to escape the shady past represented by her former boyfriend Ray. In both films, Demme is at pains to allow his heroines the possibility of redemption—as agent Downey remarks: 'Everybody deserves a

Married to the Mob: Mercedes Ruehl (Connie Russo).



final credibility is confirmed by her employment at the salon run by the hip Rastafarian, Rita 'Hello Gorgeous' Harcourt (Carol East), who is also the victim of FBI harassment.

From the opening titles, which appear over a shot of railway tracks passing beneath the wheels of a train, *Married to the Mob* hardly stops for breath. Demme's narrative has all the frantic intensity of a nightmare which with its constant shifts of pace and mood works beautifully both as a thriller and as comedy. At the same time it captures

the texture of city life: the street musicians encountered by Angela on her arrival in New York are as authentic as the slums and vacant lots through which she walks as she looks for work. Demme's wide-ranging grasp of American culture, from its power politics down to its streetlife, and his ability to incorporate it into an entertaining narrative, has surely made him one of the most articulate and rewarding American film-makers of the late 1980s.

DUNCAN WU

FAMILY PLOT

DANNY THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

'Somewhere in England. Autumn, 1955,' reads an opening title as the eye takes in a delectable slice of England's green and pleasant land. Right from the start, *Danny the Champion of the World* (Portobello) knows precisely what it is about: tradition, nostalgia, innocence, past certainties. The material derives from one of Roald Dahl's best-known books; the Censor's certificate, indeed, prints the author's name as part of the title, placing the film in the august company of Jacqueline Susann's *Once Is Not Enough* and Sidney Sheldon's *Bloodline*. But *Danny*, published in 1975, is no gruesome, tricksy tale of the unexpected. Fantasy here takes second place to the central loving relationship between young Danny and his widowed father—country garage-owner by day, skilful poacher by night.

In the original book, the exact year is unspecified. To be sure, it need not necessarily be 1955: the characters and images in Gavin Millar's film draw

sustenance from a well of shared, idealised national memories. A million schooldays down the years come crowding back as corridors ring to chanted multiplication tables and Danny faces the withering gaze of Captain Lancaster, the school's new martinet teacher, dishing out lines for the slightest breach of discipline and manners. The local copper trundles by on his trusty bike, alongside a country bus, ambulance, and other vehicles with a Dinky toy charm. Even the film's genre consciously turns the clock back: though the Children's Film and Television Foundation has maintained a stream of modest productions, it is hard to recall many pedigree attempts at a British family film since *The Railway Children* in 1972. (That film's director, Lionel Jeffries, pops up agreeably as the gin-toting Scottish headmaster.)

This is a family film made by a family. Jeremy Irons plays William, the teacher turned garage-owner living

with his nine-year-old son Danny in a gypsy caravan deep in the countryside. Irons' own nine-year-old, Sam, takes Danny's part, while the local doctor, mumbling benignly while peering over specs, is none other than his father-in-law Cyril Cusack. If William's wife were still alive, no doubt she would be played by Irons' own wife Sinead Cusack; but the character died when Danny was four months, leaving father and son to build a bond of mutual love and dependence. With his finely chiselled features and quiet, measured tones, Irons Sr looks a mite daft togged up for rusticity in flat cap and braces. But there is nothing phoney in the natural give-and-take of his exchanges with his son (a fair-haired charmer with the same pensive air); these scenes are the touching heart of the film.

So what is *Danny the world champion of?* Not school work, certainly: he soon earns the ire of Captain Lancaster, the story's subsidiary villain, played by Ronald Pickup in an imperious manner strongly recalling the delightful Raymond Huntley. The answer is poaching: one night, William introduces his son to the favourite country pursuit, practised at the expense of the principal villain's game stock. The area's odious landowner Victor Hazell is a postwar spiv clumsily posing as a country squire, lording it over tenants in a mustard-yellow waistcoat. Hazell needs William's garage to complete a swathe of land ripe for unsightly development; William refuses to sell, and strongly objects to Hazell's organised shoots, when tame pheasants reared from chicks are blasted helplessly from the skies. (Millar sensibly gets the unpleasant matter dealt with in the opening seconds.) To make Hazell the county's laughing stock, William and Danny propose poaching all 200 pheasants on Hazell's estate, luring them with one of the birds' favourite delicacies—raisins, apparently—laced with sleeping powder.

With the spectacle of Irons Sr and Jr prying open their raisins, insinuating the sleeping powder, and sewing up the damage with needle and thread, the film veers uneasily into whimsy. Yet John Goldsmith's script and Millar's direction mostly maintain a level head, delicately handling intimate moments between father and son but stirring up sufficient drama for scenes like Danny's night-time search for his missing dad (huddled in one of Hazell's man-traps with a broken ankle). There are a few false notes in the acting: Jean Marsh's tight-lipped accent as the visiting council worker gets in the way, and Robbie Coltrane is too slick and shallow to make Victor Hazell one of the really tasty villains. But, all in all, *Danny the Champion of the World* resurfaces a lost world of English life and entertainment with winning charm and aplomb.

GEOFF BROWN

Danny the Champion of the World: Sam and Jeremy Irons.



BOOK REVIEWS

HOLLYWOOD AT WORK

THE GENIUS OF THE SYSTEM Hollywood Film-making in the Studio Era

by Thomas Schatz

Simon & Schuster/£16.95

What exactly does a film producer do? We all know, or think we know, what a director or a writer or an actor does. The results are on the screen. But what does a producer actually produce? Tom Schatz's book explains more clearly than any I have read exactly what contribution the producer made to the film-making process during Hollywood's Golden Age.

The book is situated carefully in the space between two other recent accounts of Hollywood. In *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson describe how a particular type of film, the feature-length narrative obeying the rules of classical construction, became established as the norm. In *The Hollywood Studio System*, Douglas Gomery explains Hollywood's institutional organisation and the economic forces which drove it. What Schatz is concerned to show, by means of detailed case histories, is

just how the system worked in practice.

One of his most fascinating examples is MGM's 1932 production of *Grand Hotel*. His major sources are studio records deposited in academic libraries. For this reason the book concentrates on those studios whose papers are available: principally MGM, Universal and Warner Bros. Drawing on minutes of script conferences at MGM between Irving Thalberg, line producer Paul Bern and writer-director Edmund Goulding, Schatz builds a wonderfully clear and illuminating picture of how Vicki Baum's novel was crafted into a starry, polished MGM vehicle. Particularly instructive is the attention Thalberg devoted to the construction of the narrative, insisting on the need for 'motive in every line'.

There are equally revelatory accounts of David Selznick at work on the first version of *A Star Is Born* and on *Notorious*. Schatz is also adept at explaining how each studio's history took a different course: exactly why, for example, MGM was the classiest studio. There's a wonderfully telling quotation from Thalberg about money and pictures: 'It's just as important to see that it's spent as to see that

it isn't.' He shows how Warners' production centred on units in which stars and genres were mutually reinforcing, and just how and why Universal fell apart in the mid-1930s. Some of this material has already been explored by others: Rudy Behlmer in several books, Nick Roddick in *A New Deal in Entertainment*, Leonard J. Leff in his recent *Hitchcock and Selznick*. But Schatz has produced by far the most comprehensive account of how Hollywood engineered its products into the sleek, well-oiled machines they were.

So what exactly was the genius of the system? It wasn't simply that production was organised along factory lines. All countries with sizeable film production sectors have found it necessary to create something like a studio system, because the scale of resources required to make films in numbers demands continuity and planning. Hollywood's particular achievement, thinks Schatz, was that in the period of its heyday (which he places in the late 1930s) it was able to hold a balance between economic and aesthetic imperatives, between those who ran the studio, who demanded box-office success, and the artists, who often had other priorities. Thus Hollywood managed to steer a middle way between, say, the naked commercialism of network television, and the isolation from the audience which an industry run by artists or bureaucrats could engender.

That balance, as Schatz shows, would be achieved within a film, hammered out in creative conflict between the producer and the writers and director. But it was also achieved across a whole production programme. In a valuable section on MGM's musicals, Schatz calculates that in the early 1940s fully one-quarter of all MGM pictures were musicals, technically the most difficult and commercially the most risky of all genres. The company's finances were assured during this time by routine, money-spinning series such as the Andy Hardy films. One of these, *Andy Hardy Gets Spring Fever*, out-performed *The Wizard of Oz* in 1939.

The book is not simply a description, however. Its title is deliberately polemical, taken from a remark by André Bazin: 'The American cinema is a classical art, but why not then admire in it what is most admirable, i.e. not only the talent of this or that film-maker, but the genius of the system...' This comes in the course of an argument Bazin is conducting against the more extreme manifestations of the auteur theory in *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Schatz clearly has a bone to pick with

auteurism, which he dismisses as 'adolescent romanticism'. In his view the artistic achievement of Hollywood should be attributed not to individuals but to the system, since 'ultimately any individual's style was no more than an inflection on an established studio style.'

This is unfair. It is a vulgarisation of auteurism to suppose that it can be disproved by empirical data on who did what on the studio floor or in the editing room. Auteurism is not a description of how Hollywood worked, it is a theory of the text, and can only be proved or disproved by textual analysis. And so, far from film history knocking auteurism on the head, the question of how we can articulate the kind of knowledge of the system which Schatz provides with the knowledge of films which auteurism and other textual theories produce remains among the most intriguing which students of popular cinema can pose.

EDWARD BUSCOMBE

OTHER ENCOUNTERS

REALISM AND TINSEL Cinema and Society in Britain 1939-48

by Robert Murphy
Routledge/£30

Among the first films I ever saw was a North Country farce, *Over the Garden Wall*, in which (as I had remembered) the leading role of a belligerent housewife was played by Norman Evans in drag, partnered (as I had forgotten, and am indebted to Robert Murphy for reminding me) by Jimmy Jewell in the guise of 'her' husband. This reference gives some indication of the readiness, indeed eagerness, of Murphy's study to browse along not just the main thoroughfare of 1940s British cinema, as represented by Jennings, Ealing, Reed and Lean, but also an assortment of back streets: byways for variety and radio stars; Gainsborough melodramas, ancient and modern; spiv movies; and what Murphy designates as 'morbid thrillers', among them *Obsession*, in which Robert Newton's mild-mannered GP paid covert homage to the contemporary activities of John George Haigh by seeking to dissolve the body of his wife's lover in a bath of sulphuric acid.

Murphy sets up an intricate pattern of associations and echoes: thus, his remarks on the low-budget showcases for such performers as Evans and Frank Randle lead into discussion of the matching eccentricities on display in such upper-crust comedies as *Quiet Wedding*, where 'the young lovers are smothered

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BOOK REVIEWS



Good Time Girl.

by crazy relatives and friends'; and this in turn links back to the likening of *They Were Sisters*, one of the more ambitious of the Gainsborough matinée movies, to 'an aberrant descendant of well-made plays like *Quiet Wedding* and *Dear Octopus*, which celebrate the joys and agonies of upper-middle-class family life.'

Central to the prevailing thrust of the book is Murphy's consideration of *Brief Encounter* ('Can we imagine a more realistic portrait of English manners and psychology?' asked no less than André Bazin at the time) as a film which, while 'anchored to the suburban reality of Milford Junction', none the less belongs to 'a world of portents and threatening shadows'. He goes on to draw a revealing comparison between this picture and Gainsborough's *The Seventh Veil*, the most commercially successful British film of 1945. 'Both stories unfold in flashback... Both heroines have to make a choice between different sorts of love... Laura [in *Brief Encounter*] doesn't have a sadistic guardian to contend with, but like Francesca she is wracked by guilt and indecision and almost driven to suicide.' And in both films, of course, music serves a key function.

The supposed respectability divide is, in fact, shown as having been frequently characterised by continuity not only of personnel—it was Cavalcanti, 'architect of Ealing realism', as Murphy dubs him, who directed one of the most loudly reviled of underworld thrillers, *They Made Me a Fugitive*—but of subject matter too. The distinctions tended to reside, as it were, in the fine print of tone and emphasis. Another revealing comparison is offered between Ealing's *It Always Rains on Sunday* and Gainsborough's *Good Time Girl*.

Both derived (as much later, incidentally, would Hitchcock's

Frenzy) from low-life novels by Arthur La Bern, but Murphy suggests that while the former's 'fundamentally cosy community' tends to prefigure TV soap operas like *EastEnders*, the 'cold, dangerous world' of the latter, in which friendship can suddenly turn to violence, is more evocative of Victorian melodrama. This is intriguing partly because it is debatable: the Ealing picture, directed by Robert Hamer, could easily be shown to contain elements of Langian fatalism. But at a non-interpretative level, a pronounced difference between these films, it seems to me, is that *It Always Rains on Sunday* is far more fluently crafted; in *Good Time Girl*, qualities of vividness and provocation are constantly diluted by awkward pace, cramped scale and inadequate sets.

Much more generally, shortcomings not just of style but of sheer technique are a recurring factor in assessing British movies of this time. Although Murphy is trenchant on several occasions, quite prepared to describe *Root of All Evil* as 'poorly scripted, drably photographed and weakly directed', there are times when one feels that his evangelical instincts may be causing him to praise with faint damns: *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, he writes, 'is not a film which stands up to detailed critical scrutiny.'

By extension, of all the spiv movies (unless, as the book rather strangely does, you include *The Third Man* under that rubric) the one with most imaginative force is *Night and the City*, made by Jules Dassin with Hollywood resources and real stylistic command; and one fancies that it is these qualities, though they are not explicitly acknowledged, which underpin Murphy's enthusiasm for the film. In a characteristically lively aside, he points out that Dassin's liberties with London geography pale beside Carol

Reed's treatment of Belfast and Vienna respectively in *Odd Man Out* and *The Third Man*.

The book makes sardonic use of contemporary reviewers' opinions, with C. A. Lejeune's lamentations over the sordid and the silly providing a chorus-like refrain (though Murphy is fair-minded enough to point out that she stuck up for *Brighton Rock*). But if such views represent the then Fleet Street consensus about British cinema, Murphy goes on to offer, possibly not without continuing relevance, an indication of the prevailing Whitehall attitude toward filmmaking.

This is to be found in the final chapter, which in effect is free-standing but deals to concise and informative effect with the ill-fated attempts of the late 40s to take on the American industry on Britain's terms, and comes in the shape of a confidential Board of Trade memorandum: 'The film industry is not one which normal financial channels look upon with favour. Its habits are peculiar, most of the people engaged in it are rogues of one kind or another, and a good deal of money has been lost by unwise investment in it or by the uncontrolled behaviour of producers.'

TIM PULLEINE

THE GERMAN QUESTION

NEW GERMAN CINEMA: A HISTORY

by Thomas Elsaesser

Macmillan BFI Cinema Series £35.00, (paper) £10.95

The New German Cinema, its films and directors, have been the object of a vast amount of critical attention, and one's first impulse on opening Thomas Elsaesser's lengthy book is to wonder what there is in it to tempt the aficionado into buying yet another work on the subject. However, it soon becomes abundantly clear that the answer is—a great deal indeed.

Elsaesser defines his central purpose as to outline 'a framework for understanding in a historical perspective what has come to be known as the "New German Cinema", and to situate it as a national cinema within the economic development of the West German and European film industries, which have always been rivalling with Hollywood—usually without success—for dominance in Europe's domestic markets.' This in itself is hardly very original, but what distinguishes his contribution to the debate is the complexity,

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subtlety and cultural breadth of his arguments, and his refusal to accept the more heroic, individualistic (and occasionally paranoid) self-representations of the Autoren at face value.

Particularly impressive is the way in which he analyses the contradictions inherent in the whole New German Cinema project: independent (and quite frequently oppositional) film-makers attempting to gain access to state or industry funding in order to set up a national cinema that was at once culturally indigenous and economically viable. These contradictions, Elsaesser argues, produced different sets of debates or ideological fields (thus helping to explain the heterogeneity of the New German Cinema, a quality often inverted by other commentators in their misplaced desire to impose a unity on their subject), and also encouraged so many film-makers to become theorists, critics and polemicists. In the latter respect there may be some superficial similarity with the Nouvelle Vague, but while most of the French film-makers were critics-turned-directors who largely ceased writing once the transformation process was complete (with the obvious and crucial exception of Godard), the Autoren found themselves in a position in which it was constantly necessary for them to define their film-making practices.

Elsaesser summarises the Autor's contradictory position as occupying, 'a double function within a double circuit: s/he is an "artist" in the conventional bourgeois sense, and a producer in a pre-capitalist sense, engaged in a cottage industry. As artisans with a craft mentality, the film-makers faced an economic situation that gave them the status of a self-employed entrepreneur, but with the State playing the leading role in a system of patronage. Since the State also acts, via delegates such as television, as direct employer, the film-maker is servant of several masters, while having to maintain an image of autonomy and independence. Many of the political controversies arose out of the contradiction between "self-directedness" and "other-directedness".'

Elsaesser's appreciation of the extremely varied nature of the New German Cinema springs also from his awareness that different film-makers were attempting to address different groups of spectators, and that the whole phenomenon must be grasped within a wider context of increasing audience fragmentation, the cinema's changing place in the entertainment and information industries, and the consequent need, faced by all

film-makers, in Europe at least, to build new audiences.

As he puts it: 'Far from the New German Cinema constituting only acts of self-expression by a small number of highly gifted and personal directors, the logic of its production, the history of its failures and successes, and the aesthetic-formal strategies that give it a degree of stylistic coherence, derive from the various ways the films attempt to address spectators.'

The 'aesthetic-formal strategies' are, in many cases, similar to the 'Art Cinema' of other European countries. However, as Elsaesser notes, the New German Cinema is much less cinematically self-conscious than, say, the Nouvelle Vague, and more socially aware than any of its European counterparts.

In particular, in the works of Syberberg, Schlöndorff, von Trotta, Reitz, Kluge and others there is an intense concern with Germanness, with the mythology as well as the actuality of Germany, and a strong desire to interrogate the Nazi past.

Elsaesser points to the large number of films with the word 'Germany' in their title and concludes that, 'emphasis on Germany and Germanness became part of launching a brand name abroad that could play up to and reinforce a mythology taking shape around post-war German culture and the New German Cinema...'. In line with the dominant "romantic-radical" traditions of German intellectuals, film-makers took up the "German question" in much the same terms in which it had already been raised in the nineteenth century by writers like Hölderlin, Heine and Ludwig Börne. It was seen as "Die Wunde Deutschland", the wound, caused by the divisions of class, region, religion, political affiliation and nationalist sentiment, that refused to close on the body-politic of the nation-state.'

It is this breadth (and experience) of wider historical, cultural, political and ideological reference that makes Elsaesser's readings of individual films, and his placing of the New German Cinema as a whole in its various contexts, so authoritative and compelling. This is not, ultimately, a book to browse in; to do so would be to miss out on the arguments which give it its structure and are carefully sustained throughout its length.

With the publication of Elsaesser's impressive book one might think that there can be little more of interest to be written about the New German Cinema. Perhaps someone, somewhere, could now turn their attention to a much-needed new history of the rest of the German cinema.

JULIAN PETLEY

LETTERS

Venus Peter

SIR.—I write to correct several errors in Nick Kent's article on *Venus Peter* in the Spring issue of *SIGHT & SOUND*.

In fact, the Scottish Film Production Fund were first in with script development finance for *Venus Peter*. Over the several drafts that the screenplay went through, the total development financing from this Fund amounted to nearly £12,000.

The Fund was then instrumental in attracting the £1.3m necessary for the making of the film itself. Although several companies were interested in the project, it was only when the Fund agreed to become the first investor, putting up £70,000 (subsequently increased to £95,000) that the rest of the budget was secured from British Screen Finance, BFI Production Board and Orkney Islands Council.

Pennies really; except when you consider that our annual budget in the year ending April 1989 was somewhat less than £150,000, then you can see what a major investment this is.

As Director of the Scottish Film Production Fund, one of a number of problems that I am currently addressing is that of visibility; thus being relegated to a throwaway mention attributing a fractional sum does nothing for us. Certain it is that without the Fund's involvement, big or small, the film would not now be one of only two British films at Cannes this year.

Yours faithfully,
PENNY THOMSON
Director
Scottish Film Production Fund
Glasgow

Cousins

DEAR SIGHT & SOUND,—This is an open letter to the British Film Industry and the BFI. As novice screenwriters in an industry where who you know is who you are, we have been treated like

long lost cousins by the British. Our letters and phone calls have been promptly and courteously answered and well-worded, kindly rejection letters almost always include encouragement and advice on where to try next.

In comparison with the lack of response we've gotten in our own country, we have been overwhelmed with generosity in yours. And, even though nothing may come of our British connections, your interest and helpfulness has at least kept us going towards our goal of breaking into the film industry, somewhere, someday.

Thanks again, Britain.

Yours faithfully,
MARY T. JACOBS
ELLEN M. DUNLEAVY
Chicago, Illinois

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CHRIS DUNKLEY is television critic for the *Financial Times* . . . GUDIE LAWAETZ is a documentary film-maker and freelance writer . . . PATRICK MCGILLIGAN has written for many magazines including *The Velvet Light Trap*, *Jump Cut*, *Film Quarterly* and *Film Comment*; his best-known book is *Cagney: The Actor as Auteur* . . . JEFFREY SIPE is the Japan correspondent for *Screen International* and also a contributor to *Taiwan*, an Asian men's magazine out of Manila . . . HELEN TAYLOR is senior lecturer in literary studies at Bristol Polytechnic and author of two books on Southern literature and film . . . RICHARD TAYLOR is general editor of the BFI's edition of Eisenstein's *Selected Works* . . . DUNCAN WU is a post-graduate student at St Catherine's, Oxford, an amateur film-maker and editor of the forthcoming Longman *Wordsworth* . . . JOHN WYVER is a writer and independent producer with Illuminations (Television) Ltd.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ARTIFICIAL EYE for *Yeelen*, *Landscape in the Mist*, *The Legend of the Holy Drinker*, *A Taxing Woman*.

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BBC ENTERPRISES for *Poison Candy*.

WORKING TITLE FILMS for *The Tall Guy*.



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BFI PRODUCTIONS for *Melancholia*.

SODERBURGH PRODUCTIONS for *Sex, Lies and Videotape*.

TITANE/FLACHE FILM/LA SEPT for *Chine, ma douleur*.

SARAH QUILL for photograph of Peter Cowie.

FILM PRODUCTION OFFICE OF BURKINA FASO for *Yaaba*.

BLUE DOLPHIN for *La Vie est Belle*.

LES FILMS DU VOLCAN for *Tabataba*.

LEZLI-AN BARRETT, NOELLA SMITH, JANE BALFOUR, JENNIFER HOWARTH for photographs of themselves.

LEZLI-AN BARRETT for *An Epic Poem*.

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK for photograph of Ben Maddow.

ITAMI PRODUCTIONS for *A Taxing Woman's Return*.

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WARNER BROS for *Mishima, Taxi Driver*.

SKY CHANNEL for *Sky Sport* photograph of Derek Jameson.

MTV for photograph of its logo.

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NFA STILLS COLLECTION for *Intruder in the Dust*, *The Asphalt Jungle*, *Kiss the Blood Off My Hands*, *Johnny Guitar*, *God's Little Acre*, *Man of the West*, *Gone With the Wind*, photographs of Alexander Medvedkin, Philip Yordan.

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ON NOW

■ THE DREAM TEAM

(UIP)

Howard Zieff's zippy comedy, about four nervy lunatics on an outing from their hospital who lose their mind on the mean streets of New York, adroitly turns the tables on the current fashion for stalking-bogeymen pictures: the cops are the bad guys (the minder having been knocked on the head after he chances on two of them shooting a fellow officer) and the madmen, as a result, are forced to pull themselves together as best they can to avoid a phony murder rap. Michael Keaton, Christopher Lloyd, Peter Boyle and Stephen Furst, all practised, singular oddballs, skedaddle through a plot which is at times more reminiscent of the director's masterpiece, *Slither*, than of his polished, latter-day entertainments, and matters really only come momentarily unstuck when the script turns sentimental about its heroes' lost lives. For the most part, however, these are notably unself-pitying madmen, the twist being that for once they actually accept their lunacy. (Lorraine Bracco, Dennis Boutsikaris, Philip Bosco.)

■ THE NAVIGATOR

(Recorded Releasing)

The *Navigator*, subtitled 'A Medieval Odyssey', seems more at home in the fourteenth century than in the present day where the journey ends. Or at least the film is more comfortably atmospheric in its Cumbrian mining village where the rumoured approach of the Black Death inspires—along with much portentous fire and water symbolism—a desperate remedy. Six villagers, led by the most fearlessly 'outward bound' of them and his younger brother, who has had a dream of what needs to be done, volunteer to dig through the Earth to reach a fabled cathedral on the other side of the world and top its spire with a crucifix as an offering to God. But once they get to what turns out to be a metropolis in modern New Zealand, the film's impressive poetic conceit turns disappointingly whimsical, as if there were no way of sustaining the conceit or the symbolism at a narrative level (apart from some coy hints that the Black Death is but ye olde worlde AIDS or nuclear catastrophe). Back in Cumbria, the story dissolves into vaguer hints that everyone has just been narrating to themselves to keep away the dark. (Bruce Lyons, Hamish McFarlane; director, Vincent Ward.)

■ PARENTS

(Mainline)

In 50s suburbia—tract homes, kidney-shaped coffee tables,

alpha-wave wallpaper, canasta—a child begins to suspect something is amiss with his Eisenhower-era parents. Father develops defoliants, while his adoring wife slaves to produce perfect meals: but what, their son begins to wonder, is in the tasty, meaty leftovers. Two parts *Eating Raoul*, one part *The Stepfather*, this bizarre, nostalgic fable, with a shadowy gruesome centre, has all the makings of a cult picture. Young Bryan Madsen doesn't quite click as the junior paranoid—although Juno Mills-Cockell is wonderful as his weird girlfriend who claims to be an alien—but Randy Quaid and Mary Beth Hurt are faultless as the scary, uptight, ideal couple. (Director, Bob Balaban.)

□ AMOROSA

(Curzon)

Mai Zetterling leaves no stop unpulled in this visually ornate, dramatically intense bio-pic of the Swedish writer Agnes von Krusenstjerna, an aristocratic adherent of 'decadent' 20s bohemianism. Shaky script, persuasive treatment. (Stina Ekblad, Erland Josephson.)

□ COCOON: THE RETURN

(Fox)

The magical old-timers (count the names) and their alien friends return to Earth for service in a script with no mainline but a fistful of subplots: geriatric cuteness, sci-fi sloppiness. (Steve Guttenberg, Wilford Brimley, Hume Cronyn, Maureen Stapleton, Jack Gilford, Jessica Tandy, Don Ameche; director, Daniel Mann.)

□ A CRY IN THE DARK

(Guild)

Meryl Streep, plus black wig, is the accused mother and Sam Neill her husband, a Seventh Day Adventist pastor, in this reconstruction of Australia's famous 'Dingo Baby' trial. Tension is somewhat watered down by knowledge of the outcome; but director Fred Schepisi's deliberate pace does much to enhance the backdrop of detailed and often trenchant social observation. (Charles Tingwell.)

□ DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS

(Fox)

Bedtime Story quite agreeably remade with Michael Caine, the hair-oiled gent, and Steve Martin, the harum-scarum roughneck, coasting through a yarn, set in the somewhat soporific atmosphere of the Riviera, about two decisively outsmarted conmen. (Glenne Headly, Anton Rodgers; director, Frank Oz.)

□ FAREWELL TO THE KING

(Vestron)

The jungles of Borneo during WWII, scene of tortuous power plays between the Japanese invader, a British army liaison officer, and the mysterious white king of the headhunters. Messy and full of missed opportunities, but at least John Milius is back among the myths after his dire encounters with Barbarians and Commies. (Nick Nolte, Nigel Havers.)

□ FLETCH LIVES

(UIP)

Second adventure for Gregory McDonald's quizzical reporter, private eye among Deep South rednecks and revivalists. Chevy Chase gets to make with the arid one-liners and funny disguises, while Michael Ritchie seems to have definitely lost his sidelong affection for his characters that used to make his films a joy. (Hal Holbrook.)

□ HOW TO GET AHEAD IN ADVERTISING

(HandMade/Virgin)

Assigned to promote a new pimple cream, Richard E. Grant, a once unscrupulous adman, revolts at last against consumerist hypocrisy... only to discover a malignant growth on his neck. Strident allegory, marked by garbled rhetoric and frenzied slapstick; a splendid performance, however, brimming with placid cynicism, from Richard Wilson as the seasoned sales boss. (Director, Bruce Robinson.)

□ INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE

(UIP)

Another Spielberg-Lucas crowd-pleaser, though a touch less flavourful than earlier instalments: the Holy Grail is the object of the quest, the Nazis, again, the opposition. Harrison Ford, now somewhat less of an individualist, yields screen ground to Sean Connery, the hero's fussy father, and also to sidekicks Denholm Elliott and John Rhys-Davies. Imitative action sequences and some surprisingly wobbly matte fringes. (Director, Steven Spielberg.)

□ THE MIGHTY QUINN

(UIP)

Denzel Washington cuts a notably American figure as the upstanding police chief of a Caribbean island, beset by professional, political and domestic troubles during a murder investigation. Heavily applied local colour, including sundry musical interludes, fails to pep up a paltry plot. (Director, Carl Schenkel.)

□ THE RAGGEDY RAWNEY

(HandMade)

Based on stories told to the star-director Bob Hoskins by his grandmother, this undisguisedly personal project concerns a troupe of gypsies wandering through a timeless war-torn European landscape and their involvement with a deserter (Dexter Fletcher) disguised as a mad woman. Quirky and very anecdotal, but uniformly well acted against striking Czech landscapes. (Zoe Nathanson.)

□ RETURN OF THE MUSKETEERS

(Entertainment)

Lacklustre comeback for Dick Lester and almost all his crew of 70s swashbucklers—augmented by C. Thomas Howell and Kim Cattrall—nominally derived from Dumas' *Vingt Ans Après*: Richard Chamberlain has only a small role; Oliver Reed, Michael York and Frank Finlay gamely duel, but the fizz is sadly absent.

□ ROADHOUSE

(UIP)

A top-flight exploitation picture, with Patrick Swayze as a Shane-like drifter, called in to handle the bouncers in a hellhole bar, clashing with Ben Gazzara, the town-owning villain. Expertly choreographed brawling, gratuitous nudity, a varied score, fine supporting performances, adroit Western overtones and a sly humour make this stand out of the direct-to-video pack. (Sam Elliott; director, Rowdy Harrington.)

□ RUNNING ON EMPTY

(Warner Bros)

Sidney Lumet has another go at the subject of *Daniel*: the sins of the parents, or the consequences of their political acts, being visited on their children. The Popes have been on the run from the FBI since their activist days during the Vietnam War, but their teenage son now wants his own life. An appealing combination of road movie and family melodrama, but inevitably a softer, 'fictional' *Daniel*. (River Phoenix, Judd Hirsch, Christine Lahti.)

□ THEY LIVE

(Guild)

Up to halfway, John Carpenter at his evocative best, exploring the signs of an alien takeover that is turning urban America back into Depression-era Dustbowl. Disappointingly, but not unenjoyably, it then abruptly switches gear to become comic-strip action-man stuff. (Roddy Piper, Meg Foster, Keith David.)

□ THREE FUGITIVES

(Touchstone)

Francis Veber becomes the first French film-maker to direct his own Hollywood remake: a Gérard Depardieu vehicle about a paroled ex-con and a fumbling bank robber becomes a typical Touchstone vehicle for Nick Nolte and Martin Short. Matters turn drippingly sentimental whenever Short's handicapped daughter is introduced, but the rest is amiably amusing.

□ TORCH SONG TRILOGY

(Palace Pictures)

Harvey Fierstein's Broadway hit about the vicissitudes of a drag queen has been opened out and then compressed into the semblance of a conventional plot: it remains, nevertheless, theatrical and episodic. Wit and sharp observation in the early scenes are undermined by the subsequent maudlin passage of arms between the protagonist and his Yiddisher momma. (Anne Bancroft, Matthew Broderick, Brian Kerwin.)

□ WARLOCK

(Medusa)

Warlock and witchhunter, the latter predictably out to avenge the death of his spouse, are inexplicably propelled from seventeenth-century Massachusetts to present-day California. The plot consists of loose ends, and the effects have a dejected air. (Richard E. Grant, Julian Sands, Lori Singer; director, Steve Miner.)

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